



Volume 1, Number 1



ISSN:

ISSN:

Hateta

Journal of Philosoph and Applied Ethics (H-JPAE)

Content

1. Metaphysical Defense for the Rationality of Science:
Amanuel Weldu Gebre and Setargew Kenaw (pp. 1-25)
2. After Psychic Numbing: Towards Revitalizing Moral
Sensitivity in the times of Mass atrocity
Dawit Merhatsidk (pp. 26-43)
3. Being Human, Existence and Enlightenment in Classical
Ethiopian Philosophy
Eyasu Berento Assefa (pp.44-72)
4. Public Sphere, the Virtual Subject and Ethics of Social
Media
Fasil Merawi (PhD) (pp.73-87)
5. The Politics of Social Media and Peace Building in
Ethiopia: Understanding the Nexus
Nebiyu Ermias (pp.88-111)

Editor-in-Chief

- Mulata Hiluf

Associate Editors

- Assimee Misgina
- Niguse Gebremedhin
- Aba Gidey Seyoum (PhD)

Mekelle University, College of Law and Governance

Department of Philosophy



SHOUT
SHARE **IT**

Table of Contents

Metaphysical Defense for the Rationality of Science

Amanuel Weldu Gebre and Setargew Kenaw 1

After Psychic Numbing: Towards Revitalizing Moral Sensitivity in the times of Mass Atrocity ...

Dawit Merhatsidk 26

Being Human, Existence, and Enlightenment in Classical Ethiopian Philosophy

Eyasu Berento Assefa..... 44

Public Sphere, the Virtual Subject and Ethics of Social Media

Fasil Merawi..... 72

The Politics of Social Media and Peace Building in Ethiopia: Understanding the Nexus

Nebiyou Ermias..... 88

Metaphysical Defense for the Rationality of Science

Amanuel Weldu Gebre¹ and Setargew Kenaw²

Abstract

David Hume challenges the very scientific method of induction. There are also many thinkers who believe that we cannot have pure reason to choose between two competing theories. Kuhn, Duhem and Quine contend that pure reason alone would never tell us to choose the better theory from two rival theories. Others also think that it is not rational to claim to have only one legitimate method for the practice of science. For example, Paul Feyerabend is known to have argued that science should be questioned and rejected for claiming and demanding to have one definite method to pursue its goals. He rather insisted on the idea that there is no single method – a position he expresses via a dictum “anything goes.” And all these are mainly epistemological responses to the challenges of the rationality of science. This paper, however, shows that the epistemological responses are not sufficient to question or support the rationality of science and argues that this endeavor must be grounded in metaphysical principles. The argument draws on David M. Craig’s discussion of foundational metaphysical tenets alongside Carl Gustav Hempel’s tacit recognition of metaphysical assumptions for scientific explanations to work.

Keywords: Rationality of Science, Metaphysical Assumptions, Scientific Method, Epistemological Responses

1. Epistemological Challenges to the Rationality of Science

Karl Popper’s Falsification

Karl Popper argued that scientific theories have infinite claims about reality, but we have only finite evidence, and this finite evidence can never settle the issue. For he believed that

¹ Lecturer, College of Law and Governance, Department of Philosophy, Mekelle University. Email: amanuel.weldu@mu.edu.et

² Associate Professor, Center for Sustainable Development, College of Social Sciences, Arts, and Humanities, Addis Ababa University. Email: serargew.kenaw@aau.edu.et

. . . the logical problem of induction arises from (a) Hume's discovery . . . that it is impossible to justify a law by observation or experiment, since it 'transcends experience'; (b) the fact that science proposes and uses laws 'everywhere and all the time'. . . . To this we have to add (c) the principles of empiricism which asserts that in science, only observation and experiment may decide upon the acceptance or rejection of scientific statements, including laws and theories. (Popper, 1962, p.55)

Rejecting induction as a method for science, Popper introduces the criterion of falsifiability as a solution to the problem at hand. Falsificationism argues that science follows a deductive method than inductive. For Popper, it would of course be easy to find as many confirmations as possible for one's theory but this does not prove anything. Finding confirming instances of a given theory wouldn't justify, and ascribe a scientific status to theories. If a scientist holds the claim that "All X are Y" by providing a few instances of Y that are X, because there could also be other Ys that might undermine the claim, the very procedure itself is pseudo-scientific. A confirmation of a theory because of positive instances would only provide tentative support to the theory.

It should be noticed that a positive decision can only temporarily support the theory, for subsequent negative decisions may always overthrow it. So long as a theory withstands detailed and severe tests and is not superseded by another theory in the course of scientific progress, we may say that it has 'proved its mettle' or that it is '*corroborated*' (Popper, 2005, p. 10)

Therefore, for Popper, the logic of science lies on pure deductive method; and the rationality of scientific method do not depend on looking for inductive or probable theories and try to confirm them with evidence. Rather it is about conjecturing a theory and try to refute it. For him, a theory is scientific as long as it is refutable or falsifiable; severe test of scientific theory is a trial to falsify it and the one that survive such test is worth calling a scientific theory until it is falsified. Genuine scientific theories make risky predictions, and we can test them by deducing these predictions from them. If the prediction turned out to be false, then they must be discarded. But if they are verified, the theory is corroborated and supported tentatively. That is why Popper is known to have propagated that science is a set of tentative theories, not a stable or fixed body of knowledge.

Salmon on Rational Prediction

Wesley Salmon did not agree with Popper's concept of prediction; and argued that it is true that "we sometimes make predictions for the sake of testing theory" (Salmon, 1981, p. 115), but there are at least two other reasons for making prediction. We may make a prediction to satisfy our intellectual curiosity, wondering about what will happen in the future. There is also a practical prediction, in the sense that we could "find ourselves in situations in which some practical action is required, and the choice of an optimal decision depends upon predicting future occurrences" (Salmon, 1981, p. 116).

Salmon while challenging Popper's concept of corroboration, in relation to its ability of prediction or its future performance, argued that corroboration involves some elements of induction. ". . . [F]or past performance to the theory is taken to constitute a basis for some sort of claim about future performance" (Salmon, 1981, 119). In other words, unless corroboration entails induction how could Popper explain why we do accept current scientific theories as a better guide to the future than any irrational and blind guesswork?. The point here is that unlike Popper, Salmon argues that scientific theories involve mere instrumental predictions. So, let us say that we have to make a decision and the choice of our decision depends on knowing the future occurrences. For example, an engineer wants to build a movable bridge. Here his decision depends on his knowledge of how objects move in space and time, currently and in the future. Apparently, rather than relying on his own guesses, this engineer will depend on currently working scientific theory (such as Newton's theory; for Newton's theory has already made it possible to predict the motion of objects through space and time). Thus, according to Salmon, we may love making a prediction far from the interest to falsify that theory. What Salmon is saying is that since we have to rely on the current working scientific theory to predict the future for practical purpose, such prediction entails induction.

Hume thinks that we do not have any logical basis for induction. Popper is known to have argued that there is no need to "solve" the problem of induction because science is basically deductive. But there are philosophers who found this Popperian position problematic. Salmon is one of them.

Rejecting Popper's solution³ to Hume's problem of induction, Salmon contends that pragmatic approach would actually and successfully solve the problem. For that matter, Salmon contends, any known scientific methods have loopholes. He argues,

. . . if every method is equally lacking in rational justification, then there is no method which can be said to furnish a rational basis for prediction, for any prediction will be just as unfounded rationally as any other. If the Humean skeptic were right, we could offer the following parallel claim. A pragmatic belief in the predictions found in Chinese fortune cookies is not irrational, for there is nothing more rational (Salmon, 1981, p. 121).

Salmon is saying that induction is our best method to solve practical problems than any other method. In this respect, he is also defending Reichenbach's pragmatic solution for the problem of induction.

Reichenbach thinks that to justify forming our opinions by using induction, it suffices to show that no other method can do better than induction – even if we have not shown anything about how well induction will do (Lange, 2011, p. 74).

So far, we have seen Salmon arguing that Popper's falsification cannot resolve the problem; and he, supporting Reichenbach, provides us his own solution. However, his reliance on pragmatic justification still takes us back to the problem of induction. To say that induction is acceptable simply because no other method works better is not to provide rational justification, it is only an appeal to its usefulness. Therefore, Salmon's solution, though it challenges Popper's rejection of induction, still fails to solve the original Humean problem. In other words, since Salmon grounds the rationality of science in the practical success of induction, he ends up reaffirming the

³ Of course, Popper and Watkins had responded to Salmon that he totally misunderstood Popper's idea of *corroborated* theories. However, Salmon never ceased to challenge Popper's idea; and in his 1981 article "Rational prediction" he gives a detail analysis of Popper's and Watkins' response to show that Popper's idea of corroborated theory still involves prediction. (For Salmon's detail analysis on this issue see, Salmon 1981, pp. 119-125).

epistemological gap rather than solving it. Hence, his account cannot be considered sufficient to demonstrate the rationality of science.

2. Challenges from Duhem, Quine, and Kuhn

Philosophers like T. Kuhn, V.O. Quine and P. Duhem shifted the focus about questions of the rationality of science from scientific method into theory choice. According to Kuhn's concept of incommensurability, factors that determine scientists' choices of theory are not fixed and neutral, rather they are different and dependent on paradigm within which scientists do their practice as well as other extra-scientific factors such as political influence, financial power, etc. According to Kuhn, as the paradigm changes scientists see different things than they do before. Because of paradigm change "practicing in different worlds, the two groups of scientists see different things when they look from the same point in the same direction" (Kuhn, 1996, p. 150). But this challenge is problematic. During the paradigm change the world does not change, what changes is the way scientists see it. Thus, Kuhn's incommensurability does not affect the metaphysical arguments we will be discussing below. Because as Kuhn explains it, incommensurability concerns the shift in conceptual frameworks and linguistic practices, it does not concern a change in the structure of reality. What changes is the scientists' perspective shaped by paradigm. Therefore, it does not undermine the role of metaphysical principles we will be discussing, for these principles are what make any, both former and new, paradigm possible. Metaphysical presuppositions remain necessary conditions for any paradigm to function. Thus, incommensurability may affect the methodology and language of science, but it cannot displace the ontological basis that science presupposes to be meaningful and rational.

While Kuhn's incommensurability focuses on questions about paradigm shifts and the socio-historical dimensions of theory change, the Duhem-Quine thesis reinstates the epistemological gap at the center of Hume's problem of induction. In other words, their thesis addresses the very process by which theories are evaluated and chosen, thus compels us to revisit the inductive relation between data and theoretical confirmation.

The Duhem-Quine underdetermination thesis is related to the use of data or evidence to choose between two rival theories in science; the data or evidence stand on theory by way of inductive

relations. When we raise the issue of underdetermination we just talk about the role of the evidence or data to choose between two rival theories; and what we are saying here is that the relation of the data or evidence to scientific theories is based on induction. This means, a theory is confirmed by evidence if the theory entails that very evidence. And according to the underdetermination thesis, when two theories, T1 and T2, are each able to entail the same evidence, both T1 and T2 are supported or confirmed by that very same evidence, while making totally different assertions. Therefore, rationality lies in how we choose out of these theories which entail the same evidence and yet make different assertions. However, no matter which one of these theories we choose, the relation of the evidence or data that supports the theory is, still, based on induction. Hence, the underdetermination thesis takes us back to the problem of induction.

Furthermore, the rationality of science is not exclusively dependent on the rationality of theory choice, for to choose among theories requires having already established scientific theories. Thus, before we focus on whether or not scientists choose rationally between two rival theories, we have to make sure whether or not these already established theories which are available to choose are established rationally, from the beginning. Here, in this essay, as we are trying to provide the metaphysical basis for the rationality of science, we suggest that the question of the rationality of science should not be reduced to the scientists' decision to choose between rival theories, or with having one scientific method or the other. Rather, the question of the rationality of science has to be scrutinized in relation to the rigor of its method and goals it sets. Major support for our suggestion may come from C. G. Hempel, who argued that the rationality of science lies on determining the goals of scientific inquiry because, "a given action or a mode of procedure cannot be qualified as rational or as irrational just by itself, but only in consideration of the goal that it is aimed at" (Hempel, 2001, p. 361).

3. Metaphysical Presuppositions in Science

We strongly believe that it is imperative to discuss metaphysical presuppositions behind science so that we could understand where the rationality of science lies and provide further support to the epistemological arguments. Of course, one might ask why is it necessary to talk about metaphysics while one could refer to the epistemological debate, if one needs to talk about the rationality of science. But, indulging oneself with the epistemological debate to answer the question of the

rationality of science presupposes the acceptance of the “scientific method” and “theory choice” debates as the center of scientific enterprise that explains its rationality.

However, before we accept such presuppositions, we have to ask questions such as: (1) why should this emphasis on the scientific method be considered to give epistemologically valuable results? (2) Why should its results be of more than temporary significance? (3) Why should these methods be repeated for a long period of time, sometimes for centuries? (4) Even, is that possible to investigate a given subject-matter (in the case of science), before one knows or has the understanding or conception of the real nature of what is being investigated (reality)? The answer to questions 2 and 3, apparently, is that since scientists do assume what nature is (i.e. that it is uniform), the significance of scientific results are not accidental or temporal. Scientific methods are also reliable and remain to be so for long time, for the physical world acts based on law, not just accidentally. This shows us that there are metaphysical presuppositions, in scientific theories, which help scientists to assume and accept that the method they use can be repeatedly used and would still work in the future. So they do know that their method and theory would work not just temporarily but even in the future because they assume that nature is uniform, which is a metaphysical assumption.

Metaphysical assumptions are essentially behind activities of scientists and for the rationality of science as a whole. Martin Heidegger once argued that

. . . fundamental condition for the proper possibility of knowing is the knowledge of the fundamental presuppositions of all knowledge and the position we take based on such knowledge. A knowledge which does not build its foundation knowledgeably and thereby takes its limits, is not knowledge but mere opinion (Heidegger, 1967, p. 254).

As shall be shown shortly, some of the fundamental presuppositions in science are metaphysical and these metaphysical presuppositions are conditions of the very possibility of scientific enterprise. Thus before going to the metaphysical arguments for establish the rationality of science, we have to discuss the metaphysical presuppositions (viz. the principle of the uniformity of nature, the principle of substance, and the principle of causality).

The Principle of the Uniformity of Nature

The principle of uniformity of nature has been used to justify both induction in general and scientific research in particular. This principle implies that similar states of nature are followed by similar states or the future will look like the past. As David M. Craig very well shows, it also concerns change: “. . . that natural change is lawful, or takes place according to rules” (Craig, 2006, p. 53). This principle is not only assumed by scientists, but also by all living human beings; without the assumption of this principle there would be no foundation for taking any reasonable action regarding the future. Particularly, science depends heavily on this principle for it is impossible to have scientific prediction and scientific theories without this principle of the uniformity of nature.

However, this principle is not simply accepted as valid metaphysical principle. Sometimes it is confused with general scientific hypothesis, in a sense that the principle of the uniformity of nature by itself is a general scientific hypothesis, or its validity must be determined by the conformability of general scientific hypothesis. In other words “*if there is, at least, one general scientific hypothesis which is confirmable for all space and time positions then UP [the principle of uniformity of nature] is also confirmable*” (Sol, 1998, p. 2, emphasis in original). If it is true that the conformability of the principle of the uniformity of nature is determined by the existence of confirmable general scientific hypothesis for all spaces and time, it is hard to say that there is a principle called the uniformity of nature. For it is impossible to have confirmable general scientific hypothesis for all spaces and time. Nevertheless, general scientific hypothesis is totally different from the principle of the uniformity of nature. For example, historically, we have many general scientific hypotheses such as the classical mechanics which are already disconfirmed and yet we cannot say that the principle of the uniformity of nature is disconfirmed for other contemporary general scientific theories, including quantum mechanics, are confirming it. Thus, “the fact that UP [the principle of the uniformity of nature] always keeps its place in scientific theories suggests that UP [the principle of the uniformity of nature] is a metaphysical presupposition of science” (Sol, 1998, p. 2).

So far we have said that the principle of the uniformity of nature is not confirmable for it is a metaphysical presupposition; it is also important to note that this principle cannot be falsified because it is not a general scientific hypothesis, rather it is a metaphysical presupposition. We may

say that a general scientific hypothesis implying the uniformity of nature is falsified; but we cannot conclude that the principle of the uniformity of nature itself is falsified, because other general scientific hypothesis implying the principle of the uniformity of nature can be formulated. Therefore, falsifying the principle of the uniformity of nature amounts to falsify all possible general scientific hypothesis in all possible worlds, which is impossible; that is also why the principle of the uniformity of nature is a metaphysical presupposition. In addition to this, Sol argued that

Furthermore even if we were ever to give up UP [the principle of the uniformity of nature] it would not be as a result of the falsification of general scientific hypotheses. Rather, we would give up UP [the principle of the uniformity of nature] in the Kuhnian sense, i.e. as a shift from hypotheses implying UP to hypotheses implying non-UP. However, I think this would not ever be possible because every hypothesis must presuppose some kind of uniformity, local or universal. Otherwise science, as we understand it would not be possible (Sol, 1998, p. 3).

Therefore, the principle of the uniformity of nature, which states that nature is uniform, is a metaphysical principle on which all scientific hypotheses and theories are founded. Thus, scientists can give no reason for their belief that the future must resemble the past, they just assume that it will and it is based on this assumption that they formulate hypothesis and theory to establish comprehensive explanation of the universe. Now let us see how this principle is embodied in science.

The principle of the uniformity of nature is embodied in different scientific principles such as the principles of spatial and temporal invariance or covariance. Within physics, this principle is explicit in “the invariance or covariance (invariance of form) of particular physical laws with respect to different states of motion or choice of coordinate system, for example the covariance principles of general relativity” (Craig, 2006, p. 62). The principle of the indifference of spatial orientation is another scientific principle directly followed from the metaphysical principle of the uniformity of nature. The principle of the indifference of spatial orientation is “understood to mean that similar states are followed by similar states independently of their orientation in space” (Craig, 2006, p. 62).

The principle of the uniformity of nature is also manifested in the scientific method. As we have seen, the principle states that similar states are followed by similar states or it states that natural change is lawful, i.e., it takes place according to rules. Given this principal scientists always strive to determine which type of states are followed by which so that they can discover laws of nature. For example, Newton's first law of motion, which states that "everybody continues in its state of rest, or of uniform motion in a straight line, unless compelled to change that state by forces acting up on it" (Greenwood, 1988, p. 12), is impossible without accepting the principle of the uniformity of nature. Quoting Galileo, Edwin Arthur Burt in his book *the Metaphysical Foundations of Modern Physical Science* writes

Nature presents herself to Galileo, even more than to Kepler, as a simple, orderly system, whose every proceeding is thoroughly regular and inexorably necessary. . . . Nature is "inexorable," acts only "through immutable laws which she never transgresses," and cares "nothing whether her reasons and methods of operating be or be not understandable by men." (Burt, 1954, p. 74-75).

Of course, discovering natural laws is not a passive investigation; simple observation is not enough. Rather it requires active investigative procedure, and, in turn, active investigation includes controlling the conditions under which the investigation is being conducted. For example, to discover the laws of motion, Newton was inspired by the movement of the chandelier hanging on the ceiling of the church and he came up with a crude hypothesis that no matter how far the chandelier swung it took the same time to complete one swing. However, to show that this crude hypothesis is sort of natural law, he had to conduct a series of experiments; and during is experimentations he had to consider the nature of other possible unknown changes, such as *friction, speed, acceleration* and etc., which accompany the main concepts of his laws⁴. It is through such a method that he can make sure that his laws of motion become natural law and would work at different points in space and time without exception. Further support for our argument may come from Stephen Hawking and Leonard Mlodinow for they argued that

⁴ See Chapter 2 (pp. 36-80) of Harriman, D. (2010). *The logical leap: Induction in physics*. Penguin.

In modern science laws of nature are usually phrased in mathematics. They can be either exact or approximate, but they must have been observed to *hold without exception* – if not universally, then at least *under a stipulated set of condition*. For example, we now know that Newton’s laws must be modified if objects are moving at a velocities near the speed of light. Yet we still consider Newton’s laws to be laws because they hold, at least to a very good approximation, for the conditions of the everyday world, in which the speeds we encounter are far below the speed of light. (Hawking and Mlodinow, 2010, p. 18, emphasis added)

Sometimes laws of nature are related to the regularity of nature and considered as simple references of this regularity of nature. However, laws of nature in modern science are very far from being simple regularity of nature. They are very specific and precise statements which classify observed regularities in nature and is also assumed to signify fundamental causal connection. Therefore, the kind of law of nature we are referring to, which is an implication the metaphysical principle of the uniformity of nature, goes beyond simple regularity in nature and can be said to convey explanatory force.

A law of nature in this sense is not simply a statement of an observed regularity but a formalized statement of fundamental regularity which can be shown to explain a wide range of physical phenomena. The clearest examples of laws of nature in this sense are found, of course, in Descartes’s *Principia Philosophiae* of 1644, and Newton’s *Principia mathematica* of 1687. (Henry, 2004, p. 79-80)

Therefore, the expressions of natural laws, which are the specific forms of the principle of the uniformity of nature, “are not [simple] generalizations about what is the case at different times and places, but specifications of what must be the case, independently of time or place” (Craig, 2006, pp. 78-79). In other words, understanding of the metaphysical principle of the uniformity of nature, which states that similar states are followed by similar states or natural change is lawful, i.e., it takes place according to rules, helps the scientists to adopt this principle in particular cases and then discover the natural and empirical laws in the form of mathematical equations. This in turn provides a basis for scientific knowledge which is considered to be knowledge of the facts. And

“it is only when an expression has been shown to be that of an empirical law that it is admitted as a scientific fact” (Craig, 2006, p. 79).

The Principle of Substance

While the principle of the uniformity of nature underpins the regularity of events, to understand what endures through change requires us to examine the metaphysical principle of substance. Aristotle describes substances in terms of form and matter. The form is concerned with the kind of the thing or the shape of the object. While the matter is about the material composition of the object, in other words it is concerned with the question of what is the thing made of. However, this does not mean that Aristotle’s understanding of substance is concerned with totally two different ideas of form and matter. Rather, believing that the form and matter are interdependent, Aristotle relates an object’s matter with its potentiality and the form of the object with its actuality. Thus, the concept of substance as form and matter is much related and hence has unity. “Matter stands in one relation or another of teleological dependence on the form or actuality as goal (*telos*), while the form is in one way or another teleologically dominant with respect to matter” (Lewis, 1994, pp. 239-240). In a sense that matter is potentially some sort of substance and becomes an actual substance when it achieves or maintains the form of that very substance. Aristotle also talks about primary and secondary substances.

A substance –that which is called a substance most strictly, primarily, and most of all –is that which is neither *said of* [i.e. *predicated of*] a subject not *in* a subject, e.g. the individual man or the individual horse. . . . All the other things are either said of primary substances as subjects or in them as subjects. (Quoted in Broackes, 2006, p. 135)

Primary substance is a thing or object that all other things are predicated and is not predicated of other things or objects, in other words primary substance is something which is not predicated of a subject. Secondary substance, on the other hand, is something that is predicated in the primary substance. To use the example on the above quotation, when one says an individual man is bi-pedal we are saying that being bi-pedal is predicated of the individual man. But, according to Aristotle, we cannot predicate the individual man of anything, for the individual man is primary

substance. Aristotle also contends that primary substances are capable of change qualitatively while remaining the same numerically, i.e. it can have one quality at one time and another quality at another time. To explain such property of the primary substance Aristotle writes “[a]n individual man –one and the same –becomes pale at one time and dark at another, and hot and cold, and bad and good. Nothing like this is to be seen in any other case” (quoted in Broackes, 2006, p. 136). Generally, what Aristotle is saying is that primary substance is a substance that endures through time and is also capable of change.

However, the principle of substance was not an interesting question only to the ancient Greeks. Medieval and modern philosophers also took it up. If we proceed directly to the modern ones, we come across different positions from Descartes to Schopenhauer. Descartes states that there are two kinds of substance: material substance (body) and the mental substance (mind). The former one is defined by extension and the latter by thought. In other words, to think about the existence of the body without the concept of extension and the mind without thought is impossible.

Thus, for example, figure cannot be understood except in an extended thing, not can motion, except in an extended space; nor can imagination, sensation, or will, except in a thinking substance. But on the contrary, extension can be understood without figure or motion; and thought without imagination or sensation, and so on; . . . (Descartes, 1982, p. 24)

Although Descartes holds that there are two different substances and referred to as dualist, he also believes that the whole idea of substance has one general definition, i.e. a substance as a thing that does not depend on anything else for its existence. To use his own words “[b]y ‘*substance*’, we can understand nothing other than a thing which exists in such a way that it needs no other thing in order to exist (Descartes, 1982, p. 23). This definition of substance is similar to Aristotle’s definition of primary substance as “neither *said of* a subject not *in* a subject”, which means that a substance does not need something to depend on for its existence. Thus, we can see that even though we have different philosophers who argued about the metaphysical concept of substance differently, they come to close agreement on the general and essential understanding of the subject.

Leibniz also believes that the world is composite of an infinity of simple substances, which he calls them ‘monads’. Of course, the concept of substance as monads is different from the concept of substance for Descartes. As we have seen, for Descartes there are two kinds of substances: mind and body. However, Leibniz conceives substances as individual monads which are not material substances rather they are simple, non-physical and indivisible or indestructible. His concept of substance is more or less related with mind. But this does not mean that Leibniz does not believe in material or physical substances, he believes that there are also physical substances. But...

their substantiality and individuality do not derive from their being corporeal or extended, but [rather] from their relation to an individual substantial mind, or something like one. . . . [And these] “mind-like ‘monads’ are not merely the only substantial realities but the only reality of any kind, body being just a ‘well-founded phenomenon’ (Woolhouse, 1993, p. 55).

Aristotle too defines primary substance as something that which is neither said of a subject nor *in* a subject, he gives us an example of the individual man or the individual horse. And here as mentioned in the above quote, rejecting Descartes dualistic concept of substance, Leibniz focuses on the individual substance called monads which their individuality is not because of their extension or being physical but in relation to mind. Thus, Leibniz’s concept of individual substance can be related to Aristotle’s concept of primary substance, which is concerned with individuality, too. Furthermore, Aristotle, Descartes and Leibniz seem to share the idea that to be a substance is to be something, to have some properties. They all also believe that, whether as an individual kind of substance or dual substance, whether as destructible or indestructible, substance has an extended existence in time.

Nevertheless, in modern science the understanding of substance is related to the concept of change. According to this understanding, the change in substance is not a change in the quality of the substance. In other words, substances exist perpetually, and change is a sort of modification of the substance.

The concept that is of particular relevance to modern science is that according to which substance exists perpetually and change is but an alteration of the substance.

An important corollary of this conception is that no (portion of) substance either comes into or goes out of existence (Craig, 2006, p. 55).

Thus, even though the meaning and definitions of the concept of substance has evolved through time, the principle that all change consists in the alteration of the fundamental substance has always remained the same. For example, it has been believed that a substance cannot occupy more than one place at a time and the whole one place cannot be occupied by more than one substance, but later this evolved to the notion of “field.” Craig points out,

. . . the notion of a field [which] has developed whereby two fields, both being physical existents, can occupy the same place. The principle itself, however, according to which all change consists in the alteration of the underlying substance has remained the same (Craig, 2006, p. 56).

Furthermore, as we have tried to mention above, since there are different understandings of substances, a substance can be conceived differently in two different disciplines. For example, matter can be conceived as a substance in the discipline of chemistry, while mass or energy is a substance in physics. Nonetheless, the metaphysical principle of substance still remains the same. In other words, even the concept of substance has evolved through time and even it can be conceived in different ways within different disciplines, the perspective that change consists in the alteration of the underlying substance has remained the same. This metaphysical principle of substance is therefore fundamental for the understanding and practice of science. Science upholds its fundamental laws such as the law of the conservation of matter and the law of the conservation of energy as indubitable laws because of this fundamental conviction about the principle of substance.

For example, in chemistry it is found in the law of the conservation of matter, which states that in chemical reaction matter never changes in quantity but only in form. According to the law of conservation of matter, this means that

Matter can neither be created nor destroyed. Matter, of course, is stuff. It is any kind of stuff –solid, liquid, or gas. The law of conservation of matter says that whatever anyone does to an object, the matter is made of will continue to exist, in

some form or another. This law is also known as the *law of conservation of mass*. Mass is the measurement of the amount of matter that any object contains. (Fleisher, 2002, pp. 11-12).

To use Fleisher's example, grinding a rock into powder does not change matter or substance at all, the change we see is just physical change and it is still a rock. Even when we toss the powder up into the wind, it may blow away, but nothing is destroyed "Perhaps some of our rock powder fall into farmer's field, a corn plant absorbs some the minerals through its roots. The rock becomes part of the corn plant, but it still exists. If we eat the corn, the minerals become part of our body. Still nothing has been destroyed (Fleisher, 2002, p. 12).

The law of conservation is also found in physics as a law of conservation of energy; and it states that total energy of an isolated system remains the same despite internal changes.

Energy comes in several different forms. It can take the form of heat, light, electricity, kinetic energy (movement), chemical energy (like the energy in coal, gasoline, or food), or nuclear energy. The law of conservation of energy tells us that energy can be converted from any of these forms to any other forms. It is still energy, and none of it disappears when is converted. (Fleisher, 2002, pp. 37-38)

Here we can see that metaphysical principles are embodied in science and can concern different parts of reality when applied in different sciences and it can also evolve when applied within one science. And yet the metaphysical principle of substance that all change consists in the alteration of the fundamental substance (matter in the case of chemistry and energy in the case of physics) has always remained the same and persists through time. This metaphysical principle defines what is possible or necessary and guides modern physicists to understand and consider that it is impossible for energy to increase or decrease under normal conditions, since energy is neither created nor destroyed. This in turn defines where reasoning and rational discussion should begin in the discourse of the rationality of science.

The Principle of Causality

We have seen that substance cannot be created out of nothing or destroyed into nothing, in other words whatsoever change may occur still there is no change in quantity or mass, except in form. The principle of causality is also concerned with change, and states that change is caused, and in science it is conceived as natural or physical cause. This principle, as is the principle of the uniformity of nature, is a fundamental and rational principle to people in their ordinary lives. It is through this principle that human beings attempt to explain the things they face in reality and justify the very existence of such things by revealing their causes. Science is therefore unthinkable without the metaphysical principle of causality.

The basic condition underlying the entire dimension of scientific research is the firm belief in the causal inevitability of natural phenomena. . . . Accordingly we can assert that scientific research, especially as it has developed after the Renaissance, can be considered to be primarily the practical application of the principle of causation based on observation, analysis, (deductive or inductive), experiment, formation of hypothesis, and the formulation of theories and models.
(Rogopoulos, 1966, p. 135)

However, the metaphysical principle of causality we are discussing here should not be conceived as it was conceived by Hume. The principle of causality is concerned with the production of change, and apparently in the production of this change quality disappears and another quality is brought into existence. To use the above example about grinding a rock, when we grind the rock the quality of hardness and having a definite shape (round shape) is changed into softness and powder respectively. The general idea of the metaphysical principle of causality is that there is a cause for every quality which is produced at every event. There are, of course, philosophers who believe that the principle of causality is identical with the principle of the uniformity of nature. For example, David Hume believes that causal connections are assumptions which are the result of frequently repeated observations, i.e. things are constantly related with one another. Thus, causality is nothing, but constant conjunction. However, the principle of causality is concerned only with the production of change and cannot guarantee us that every example of constant conjunctions are causal relations. Because there are many examples that do not fit in Hume's idea,

say day and night, which are instances of constant conjunctions, but with no guarantee for causal relation.

The confusion between the principle of causality and principle of the uniformity of nature arises because both principles deal with change and our expectation of regularity in nature. When a specific effect regularly follows a given event, for instance fire and heat, it may look like that what we observe is not just a constant conjunction but a genuine causal connection. That is why, for empiricist like Hume, causality is reduced to constant conjunction we observe regularly; and this makes it difficult to grasp the difference between regularity and the actual cause that brings about the change. This, in turn, confuses the metaphysical principle of causality which deals with production of change with the metaphysical principle of the uniformity of nature which deals with regular patterns.

Nevertheless, the principle of causality is not identical with the principle of the uniformity of nature. As Craig clarifies, these principles differ fundamentally in their metaphysical focus:

. . . it is important to distinguish the two principles. Their essential difference lies in the fact that the principle of causality does not concern lawfulness, or the following of a rule, but cause, or the production of an effect. Where the principle of the uniformity of nature implies a regularity . . . in natural change without indicating the reason for that change, the present principle [which is the principle of causality] indicates the reason without implying regularity. (Craig, 2006, p. 58)

Despite their differences, these two principles fit well together. Since the principle of causality concerned with the reason in natural change, it provides the content; and since the principle of the uniformity of nature is concerned with regularity it provides the form. “Unified in a particular way, these two principles state that all change is caused in a regular fashion, i.e. that causes are regular in their effects . . .” (Craig, 2006, p.59).

That said, now let us see how the metaphysical principle of causality is concretely found in science as a fundamental principle. This metaphysical principle is found in science as the principle in dynamics, particularly in most fundamental law of inertia. The law of inertia states that a body at rest remain at rest or a body in a straight-line motion remains in constant motion in a straight line

unless acted upon by outside force. In other words, an object at rest will remain at rest unless acted on by an unbalanced external force, and an object in motion continues with the same speed and in the same direction unless acted on by an unbalanced force. This means that objects keep doing what they are doing and there will be no change in their state of motion. If there is change that change is caused by external force and this in turn implies that if there is no other external force to cause a change, anything at rest remains at rest or anything in a straight-line motion remains in constant motion. Therefore, the law of inertia implies that there are no uncaused changes of states in the world, which is an implication of the metaphysical principle of causality.

The principle of causality can also be found in the contemporary complex principle of physics which is the principle of locality. According to this principle, “causal influence cannot be propagated at a speed greater than that of light; and the refinements suggesting that effects be proportional to their causes, and that the action of every cause be balanced by an equal and opposite reaction” (Craig, 2006, p. 65). Thus, we can see that the metaphysical principle of causality is embodied in this fundamental principle of locality, which is very complex. This principle is complex because it creates fundamental relation between the principle of dynamics and the principle of conservation of momentum and energy. And yet the validity of this principle lies on the metaphysical principle of causality.

So far, we have seen three metaphysical principles on which the fundamental principles of science depend; and when we combine these three metaphysical principles, we find that change is caused (the principle of causality) and this change acts regularly (the principle of the uniformity of nature). Generally speaking, these two metaphysical principles imply that causality acts based on regularity. And the third metaphysical principle (principle of substance) shows that although causality acts regularly, the change it brings about in the substance is not quantitative rather it is all about relocation of the substance; for the principle of substance states that all change consists in the alteration of the underlying substance without change in the quantity. The combination of these three metaphysical principles provide defined and controlled reality for science, so that science can easily manipulate and investigate reality so as to explain it comprehensively.

4. Metaphysical Arguments for the rationality of science

The rationality of science does not lie in an isolated method or in choosing one from two rival theories, but rather it lies in both the goals of science and its methods. For a single action (for example a decision to choose between theories) or a mode of procedure (for example inductive method) cannot be judged as rational or irrational just by itself. Thus, the rationality of science pertains to the alignment of scientific methods with the goals it sets, namely the formulation of a coherent worldview and the establishment of increasingly accurate empirical knowledge. Science therefore is goal-oriented activity, and its rationality is anchored in how effectively it employs its methodological tools to achieve those goals.

However, Hempel locates rationality in scientific explanation through laws. According to him there are two models of scientific explanation: Deductive nomological or the deductive model and Inductive-probabilistic or the probabilistic model. These two models are two ways of answering the question as to the “why” which an empirical science is trying to answer (Hempel, 2001, p. 69).

Even though there are two models of scientific explanation, both of them depend on the fundamental concept of law. Hempel thinks that scientific explanation can be understood by subsuming some corresponding laws, in a sense that scientific explanations explain a single occurrence event by drawing their explanation from premises that include at least one law or law-like sentence.

Thus, the two modes of explanation agree in accounting for a given phenomenon by reference to what. . . I will call covering laws; I will accordingly refer to both of the corresponding models as covering-law models of scientific explanation (Hempel, 2001, p. 69).

The difference between these two types of explanations also lies in the character of the laws that they depend on. “A deductive nomological explanation is based on laws which express unexceptional uniformities; such laws are of strictly universal form...” (Hempel, 2001, p. 69). While in an inductive-probabilistic explanation has a statistical character, at least all of the laws are not strictly universal (Hempel, 2001, p. 71). Even Hempel himself explicitly writes that “Explanations by covering laws . . . have a further feature which seems to me characteristics of all scientific explanation, namely, they rest on general laws” (Hempel, 2001, p. 75).

However, these laws themselves rest upon metaphysical presuppositions. The principle of the uniformity of nature, the principle of substance and the principle of causality are foundational metaphysical assumptions for the very possibility of science. As we have shown, these principles are embodied in the fundamental scientific laws and are presupposed in experimental and theoretical practices.

Consider, for instance, Galileo's observations of pendulum motion, Newton's laws of optics and motion, or Einstein's general relativity. Each of these were the result of repeated observations and experiments. And the very decision to conduct repeated observation and experiments presupposes the uniformity of nature. Without assuming that similar states will follow similar states, there would be no basis for replication of experiment or prediction. Thus, it is this commitment to the metaphysical principle of the uniformity of nature that justifies the scientific practice of repetition and allows scientists to generalize from empirical findings.

But the principle of uniformity alone is not sufficient. As scientists investigate change in experimental conditions, they also assume the principle of substance to understand and determine the nature of the changes in their experiment. As shown, the principle of substance maintains that substance persists, and change is but an alteration of the substance or a substance cannot be generated or destroyed. For instance, in chemical experiments or astronomical observations, scientists differentiate between transformations and destructions. The principle of substance ensures that change is understood not as extinction but as modification of an enduring reality. This, in turn, confirms the assumption that observed changes pertain to the same entity, thereby ensure experimental continuity and coherence.

Furthermore, the principle of causality justifies the explanatory goal of science. This principle allows scientists to perceive change as a result of defined and determinate causes, not as random or spontaneous. This principle justifies the idea that similar causes produce similar effects and is foundational for theory-building, testing and generalization. Moreover, the principle of causality can be understood as a corollary of the principle of non-contradiction in logic. The principle of causality tells us that change is caused, or change is an effect of a cause (usually action) and similar cause leads to similar effect, implying that an object cannot act in contradiction to its nature. Thus, causality not only ensures that change is lawful but that it is also intelligible and traceable.

The integration of these three principles provides science with a defined and consistent reality. They limit arbitrary speculation, enable successful predictions, and set the ground for the possibility of theoretical reasoning and empirical investigation. The principle of uniformity rules out miracles or arbitrary occurrences in natural order; the principle of substance prevents theories to conjecture ontological leaps from nothing; and the principle of causality excludes randomness and spontaneity as an acceptable explanation in scientific discourse.

As Craig emphasizes

. . . the principle of substance implies that it is impossible for substance to arise from nothing or become nothing. In its explicit form in physics as the principle of the conservation of energy it says the same regarding energy. Given the present state of physics, physicists would consider it impossible that energy increase or decrease in an isolated system, and significant steps have been taken to avoid such a conclusion in their reasoning (Craig, 2006, p. 66).

Thus, by defining what is possible or necessary, metaphysical principles shape and determine the scientist's imagination and inquiry. These principles do not merely provide assumptions or guidelines; they constitute ontological foundations for scientific reasoning. They determine the limits within which it is meaningful to seek explanation, thereby preventing unnecessary and baseless challenges to the rationality of science. As Craig further notes:

. . . it [is] idle simply to advance *methodological* principles concerning how to go about acquiring knowledge or understanding, without giving them an ontological grounding, as has frequently been done throughout the history of reflection on science (Craig, 2006, p. 69, emphasis in original).

What Craig is saying is that these metaphysical principles are not limited to theoretical science. Even practical scientific methods presuppose metaphysical assumptions. For example, the whole experimental method is possible because scientists presuppose the metaphysical principle of the uniformity of nature. Without this principle it is impossible for scientists to conduct their experiments, for there would be no justification to conduct and repeat series experiments without expecting that similar state will be followed by similar state. Moreover, without the principle of

substance, there would be no coherent continuity of experimental objects; and without the principle of causality, there would be no reason to expect that similar experimental operations would cause consistent results.

5. Conclusion

This paper argues that the rationality of science cannot be fully defended through epistemological responses alone, such as pragmatic induction, falsification, or paradigm shifts. Of course, these approaches provide important dimensions of scientific practice, however they are not sufficient to justify sciences coherence and reliability. Thus, we defend the view that science presupposes three fundamental metaphysical principles: the uniformity of nature, the principle of substance, and the principle of causality. By defining what counts as change, continuity, and causation, these principles provide the ontological foundation for the possibility of scientific reasoning, experiment, and explanation. Therefore, the rationality of science can be defended metaphysically in relation to its goals and methods.

Taking the definition of science as an intellectual and practical activity that deals with the systematic study of the structure and behavior of the physical and natural world through observation and experiment to achieve its goals, we can see that science is an activity that devotes and commits all its activities to its goals. Thus, the devotion and commitment in its activity implies the possibility of achieving the goals it seeks, and rationality lies in its activities to realize its goals through the metaphysical foundations which defines its reality and are consistence with its subject matter and methodological laws.

Since the truth or logic of the ultimate laws in science relay on the metaphysical principles, doubting the reliability of scientific activities and its results while ignoring its ultimate laws, which in turn depends on the metaphysical principles, would be missing the point. In other words, science is rational activity because its activity is founded on metaphysical principles, i.e., these metaphysical principles are the ontological conditions of the possibility of the very scientific enterprise. Thus, to think, one way or the other, about the rationality of science without considering this metaphysical basis would be linguistically impossible, if not logically contradictory.

References

- Broackes, J. (2006). Substance. *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 106, 133-168.
- Burt, E. A. (1954). *The metaphysical foundations of modern physical science*. Humanities Press.
- Craig, D. M. (2006), *The metaphysics of science: An account of modern science in terms of principles, laws and theories*. 2nd ed. Springer.
- Descartes, R., (1982). *Principles of philosophy*. (V. R. Miller & R. P. Miller, Trans.) Springer Science & Business Media.
- Doig, J. C. (1972) *Aquinas on metaphysics: A historical-doctrinal study of the commentary on the metaphysics*. Printed in the Netherlands.
- Fleisher, P. (2002). *Matter and Energy: Principles of Matter and Thermodynamics*. Lerner Publication Company.
- Greenwood, D. T. (1988). *Principles of dynamics*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Harriman, D. (2010). *The logical leap: Induction in physics*. Penguin.
- Hawking, S., & Mlodinow, L. (2010). *The Grand Design: new answers to the ultimate question of life*.
- Heidegger, M. (1967). Modern science, metaphysics and mathematics. In W. B. Barton, Jr., and Vera Deutsch, (Trans.) *What Is a thing?* (pp. 66-108). Chicago: Henry Regnery Co.
- Hempel, C. G. (2001). *The Philosophy of C. G. Hempel: Studies in science, explanation, and rationality*. Fetzer H. James (Ed.). Oxford University Press.
- Henry, John (2004). Metaphysics and the origins of modern science: Descartes and the importance of laws of nature. *Early Science and Medicine*, 9(2) 73-114.
- Kuhn, T. S. (1996). *The structure of scientific revolutions*, 3d ed. University of Chicago press.
- Lange, M., (2011). *Hume and the Problem of Induction*.
- Laudan, L. (1977), *Progress and Its Problems*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Lewis, F. (1994). *Aristotle on the Relation between a Thing and its Matter*. In *Unity, Identity, and Explanation in Aristotle's Metaphysics*. Eds. Scaltas, T., Charles D., and Gill, M. L. pp. 247-277. Oxford University Press.
- Popper, K. (2005). *The logic of scientific discovery*. Routledge.
- , (1962). *Conjectures and refutations: The growth of scientific knowledge*. BASIC BOOKS, Publishers NEW YORK LONDON.
- Regopoulos, M. (1966). The principle of causation as a basis of scientific method. *Management Science*, 12, 135-139.

- Salmon, W. C. (1981). Rational prediction. *British Journal for the Philosophy of Science*, 32(2), 115-125.
- Sol, Ayhan (1998). *Is the Principle of the Uniformity of Nature a Scientific Hypothesis?* Available at www.romemetaphysics.org. Accessed 25/5/2015.
- Woolhouse, R. S. (1993). *Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz: the concept of substance in seventeenth-century metaphysics*. New York: Routledge.

After Psychic Numbing: Towards Revitalizing Moral Sensitivity in the times of Mass Atrocity

Dawit Merhatsidk⁵

Abstract

This article examines the persistent global failure to address mass atrocities and human rights abuses, highlighting the erosion of moral sensitivity and international structures designed to prevent mass atrocity. Despite humanity's innate capacity for empathy, as exemplified by poignant images of suffering, conflicts in regions like Tigray, Ukraine, Syria, and Myanmar underscore a troubling pattern of indifference and partiality i.e. not giving equal attention according to magnitude of suffering. Drawing on psychological and philosophical frameworks, the article explores the mechanisms behind humanity's repeated inaction in the face of mass atrocity. Concepts such as "psychic numbing," dual-process theories of decision-making, and the role of moral intuition are discussed to explain how emotional desensitization, self-defence from being overwhelmed and societal detachment contribute to moral inertia. The article advocates for a psycho-moral approach that integrates compassion, imagination, and rational deliberation to revitalize moral sensitivity and foster proactive responses to mass atrocity/genocide. By confronting the psychological and moral barriers to action and partiality when action is taken, the article aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the human condition and the mechanisms required to prevent future atrocities.

Key words: *Mass Atrocity, Moral Sensitivity, Psychic Numbing, Moral Inertia, Dual-Process Theory, Humanitarian Ethics, Partiality, Empath*

Introduction

As Slovic *et al* (2007) rightly indicate, the 21st century was marked by unparalleled violence. As an episode of mass atrocity and violence against human beings, we are currently looking at the theatre of human rights abuses and crime against humanity or genocide in Ukraine, Syria, Haiti and Myanmar, the Sudan, Palestine, Israel, and Ethiopian regions in general and Tigray region in

⁵ **Dawit Merhatsidk** is a policy-oriented social science researcher and humanitarian professional working at the intersection of philosophy, humanitarian ethics, and development. He can be reached at dawitbmm@gmail.com or +251-935086017

particular. Particularly the increase of conflict and conflict related human rights abuses, sexual violence and mass atrocity, has shown a disregard to basic International Human Rights Laws and the UN Human Rights chief, Volker Türk, indicated that the “the world is at an especially dangerous moment in history ... reaching a deafening crescendo” as a result of the erosion of international basic structures that were formulated after the World War II and Holocaust to protect human rights and prevent atrocity.

The situation of Human Rights Abuse in the world is so bad that massive human rights abuse in so many parts of the world, including many Ethiopian communities, are currently facing the scourge of war and its dire consequences, such as sexual abuse and harassment as well as dehumanizing acts of violence. This is particularly true in protracted humanitarian crises due to the conflict that broke out on November 4, 2020, in Ethiopia’s Tigray region, which resulted in massive human rights abuses and mass atrocities. It is not the intention of this article to explore the causes, narratives, nature, and consequences of the war. Instead, the main point of the article is to explore what stands out in these episodes of mass atrocity and abuses, the ever-growing insensitivity of human beings in the ever-growing nature of human suffering and mass atrocity. Perhaps, even more troubling than the mass atrocity and the growing disregard to human rights and values themselves is humanity's pervasive inaction or partiality when acting—our collective failure to prevent and respond effectively to mass atrocity and genocide. This passive bystanding should deeply trouble us, both as a global community and as scholars. If such moral inertia fails to evoke in us profound perplexity, one might wonder what else could. Of course, most of the mass atrocity and genocide have the intention of achieving a calculated benefit for the perpetrators. It is not the aim of this article to explore these motivations. However, it is apparent that behind every motivated perpetrator, there are millions of community members whose indifference and inaction has allowed it to happen.

Thus, it becomes imperative to grapple with a critical question: Why do people and their institutions repeatedly fail to prevent wars and their devastating consequences in the first place and respond effectively when they happen with violence against Human Rights, Mass atrocities and genocide, despite the vow of *never again*? This inquiry is based on two assumptions. The first one is that human beings is not inherently incapable of feeling the suffering of other people and the second one is the observable reality and history that genocides and other mass atrocities possess a distressing pattern of repeatability.

Despite studies and calls by prominent individuals, who witnessed genocide like General Roméo Dallaire and Samantha Power, and a repeated vow of “never again” at each episode of genocide and mass atrocity by the international community, it appears that humanity is waiting for the next genocide to unfold. The prevention of genocide needs a critical study of human elements that potentially ignore genocide and mass atrocities. As General Roméo Dallaire states “to study this human tragedy (genocide) and to contribute to our growing understanding of the genocide, we need to critically study what surrounded the event as such. If we do not understand what happened, how will we ever ensure that it does not happen again?” (Dallaire, 2005, p. 548).

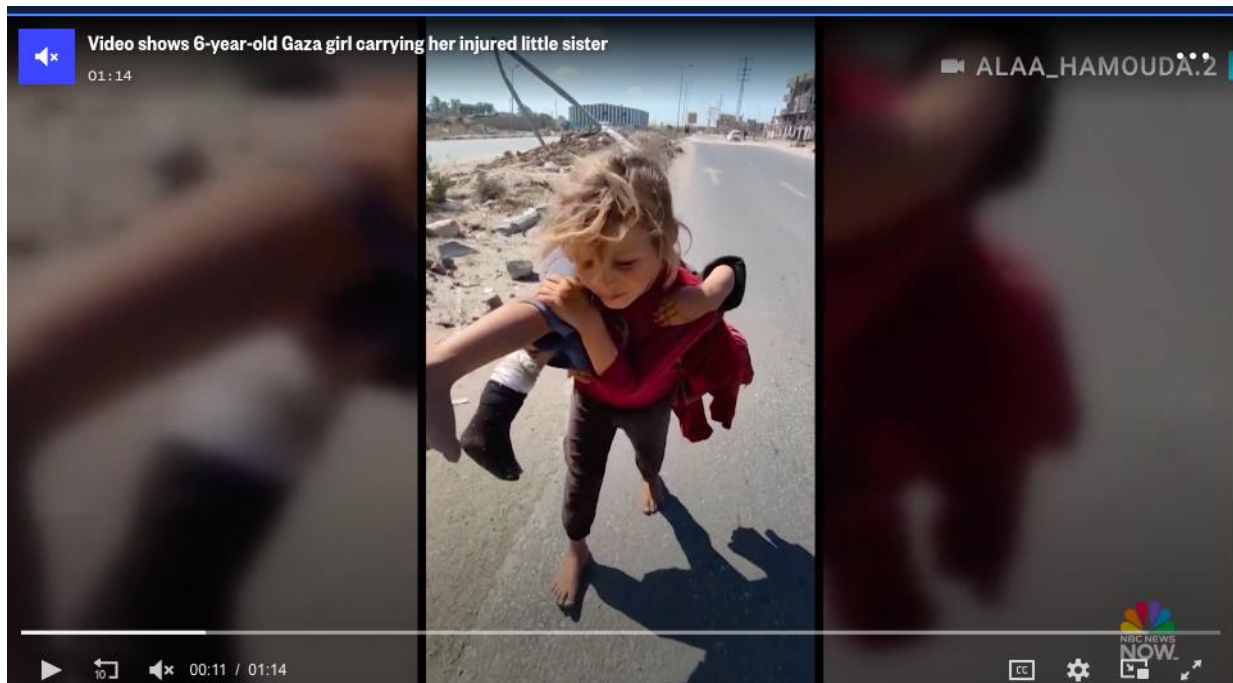
In this article, I will explore psychological and philosophical assumptions and understandings that let human beings to ignore or tolerate genocide and mass atrocities. In response to the urgent need for practical engagement with real-world instances of mass atrocity, this paper will also analyse cases of human rights violations using atrocities committed in Tigray. Further, this paper will also ponder the role of academics in renewing moral sensitivity, institutional accountability, and scholar engagement. At this point, it is important to note that genocides and mass atrocities are shaped and influenced by divergent and overlapping political dynamics, economic, historical relationships and social factors. These factors interact in ways that are often context-specific and resistant to reductionist explanations. This paper does not seek to offer a comprehensive theory of genocide/mass atrocity, but rather to examine one critical yet often underexplored dimension: the psychological mechanisms that underpin societal inaction and muted emotional responses in the face of extreme violence. Particulate, this article focuses on the dynamics of psychic numbing as a psychological response that may contribute to the normalization of atrocity and its implications to moral responses. This would enable us to situate the analyses on the broader context and expand our understanding by including emotional or psychological factors into the analysis.

To address the paradox of moral indifference in the face of mass atrocity, this article proceeds in several sections. It begins with a psychological exploration of how affect and cognitive processing shape human responses to suffering, particularly through the framework of dual-process theories. The next section integrates philosophical perspectives on moral intuition and judgment, emphasizing the ethical limitations of relying solely on emotional or rational reasoning. This is followed by a discussion on the valuation of human life in the context of mass atrocity/genocide and the phenomenon of psychic numbing. To understand the structure of emotion, I will employ a phenomenological understanding of emotion to ponder compassion fatigue. The paper then reflects

on the moral responsibility of scholars, institutions, and society, especially in the Tigray context, and finally proposes a psycho-moral framework for reawakening moral sensitivity and fostering meaningful engagement against mass atrocities.

The Approach

We begin with the premise that human beings are not inherently indifferent to suffering. On the contrary, we are profoundly sensitive to pain, often extending from our empathy beyond our immediate circles, transcending divisions of race, culture, and even species (Slovic *et al* 2007). Take, for instance, the image of a six-year-old Qamar Subuh, a Palestinian child carrying her sibling barefoot, a moment that moved countless people worldwide, regardless of political alignments. Such instances of shared human feeling remind us of a universal capacity to empathize with suffering. However, this raises a paradox: If we are so acutely attuned to suffering, why does genocide continue to recur? What underlying aspects of human psychology, societal structures, or philosophical paradigms enable us to ignore the warning signs of mass atrocity?



Picture one: Six-year-old Qamar Subuh caring her injured sister. Source: NBC available at: <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/gaza-girl-carried-sister-injured-video-interview-rcna177547>

General Roméo Dallaire, who commanded a small peacekeeping force during the Rwandan

genocide, vividly captured this paradox (Dallaire, 2005). Despite his urgent warnings to the international community about the unfolding tragedy, the world failed to act, resulting in the deaths of over 800,000 people. In his reflections, Dallaire poses a haunting question: "If we do not understand what happened, how will we ever ensure that it doesn't happen again?" This sentiment is echoed by survivors and scholars of other genocides, from Armenia to Tigray, who continue to call for a deeper understanding of the mechanisms that enable such horrors. It is a call for each one of survivors and individuals of the human community to stop and learn the lesson from the tragedy in order not to let it happen again.

To explore these questions and propose a recommendation, I propose four guiding questions:

1. What aspects of human nature allow us to ignore mass atrocities during genocide?
2. Why do we consistently fail to respond to widespread human rights abuses?
3. How do we, and how should we, value human life—both as a factual reality and as a moral imperative?
4. What role should scholars, particularly those in Tigray, play in addressing and interpreting genocidal violence?

In attempting to answer these questions, I suggest adopting a psycho-moral approach that integrates insights from psychology and moral philosophy. Such an approach considers two fundamental questions when confronted with suffering: (1) How do I feel about what is happening? and (2) How ought I to act in response? The first question addresses the psychological dimensions of empathy and emotional response, while the second engages with moral reasoning and ethical responsibility. The combination of both psychology and philosophy/moral philosophy, can help us to better articulate the fundamental mechanisms of human psychology and the consequent moral actions, particularly in the time of mass atrocity and genocide.

To understand how human insensitivity and inaction are shaped by an overwhelming amount of stimulus added, I will employ psychic numbing that offers a good analytical framework for understanding the moral paralysis that often accompanies mass atrocities and genocides. Psychic numbing directly explains the emotional desensitization that occurs when individuals or societies are confronted with large-scale human suffering. It explains why people may respond empathetically to a single victim yet remain indifferent to the suffering of thousands, a

phenomenon not adequately captured by rationalist or duty-based ethical models.

The Psychological Approach

Research aimed at identifying the psychological mechanisms that lead us to disregard mass murder and genocide relies on a theoretical framework emphasizing how emotions and feelings affect our decision making in our everyday life (Slovic *et al*, 2007: 3; Barrett and Salovey, 2002). Most importantly affect-as-information hypothesis (Schwarz & Clore, 1983) is that people use their feelings to understand the outer world and act accordingly. The basic form of feeling people have in their day-to-day life is an affect⁶. Schwarz and Clore (1988) outline how our basic form of feeling, *affect*, plays a vital role in making sense and judgment. According to Slovic *et al* “affect is the positive and negative feelings that combined with reasoned analysis to guide our judgments, decisions, and actions” (2007: 1).

The question “how do I feel about it?” conveys not only feeling but rather values as the feelings we have possess both negative and positive aspects about things. Literature in psychology indicates the significant influence of our affects in imbuing information received with meaning and thus serves as a powerful tool in shaping human behavior, views, choices, and decision-making (Le Doux, 1996; Mowrer, 1960; Tomkins, 1962, 1963; Zajonc, 1980). Affect provides the framework necessary in making sense of what we receive through different ways of our sensual feelings.

However, human understanding extends beyond mere emotion. People interpret the affect they received in different ways, having values and ‘reasoning’ attached to their feelings. In response to how human beings respond to affect, and how does that affect our judgment and choices? Epstein argues that “there is no dearth of evidence in everyday life that people apprehend reality in two fundamentally different ways, one variously labeled intuitive, automatic, natural, nonverbal, narrative, and experiential, and the other analytical, deliberative, verbal, and rational” (1994: 710). This way of thinking in psychology is called the dual process of thinking. Stanovich and Wason labeled those two ways of thinking as *System 1* thinking and *System 2* thinking. Thus, as elaborated by Stanovich and Wason (1994), there are two distinct systems of thought as follows:

1. **System 1:** automatic, intuitive, rapid, and experiential. It operates without requiring

⁶ Feelings, move emotionally

conscious deliberation and is heavily influenced by affect.

2. **System 2:** analytical, deliberative, slow, and verbal. This system relies on conscious reasoning and logic.

Philosophical Approach

Despite the need to move from *System 1* to *System 2* way of thinking in judgment and decision-making, theorists give affect the primary role in influencing human behaviors. Following this, Kahneman (2003: 698) indicates that the utility of *System 2* thinking is to provide meaning and monitor the affect and impression we receive. Furthermore, *System 2* models *System 1* into behavior and choices. However, he stresses that *System 1* thinking may be slack and may mislead moral judgments.

According to Hogarth “the essence of intuition or intuitive responses is that they are reached with little apparent effort, and typically without conscious awareness. They involve little or no conscious deliberation” (2001: 14). Inferred is, moral intuition in philosophy refers to the view that there are moral truths reached by the process akin to perception, rather than by the process of rationalization and can be the first and direct cause for moral judgment (Haidt, 2001).

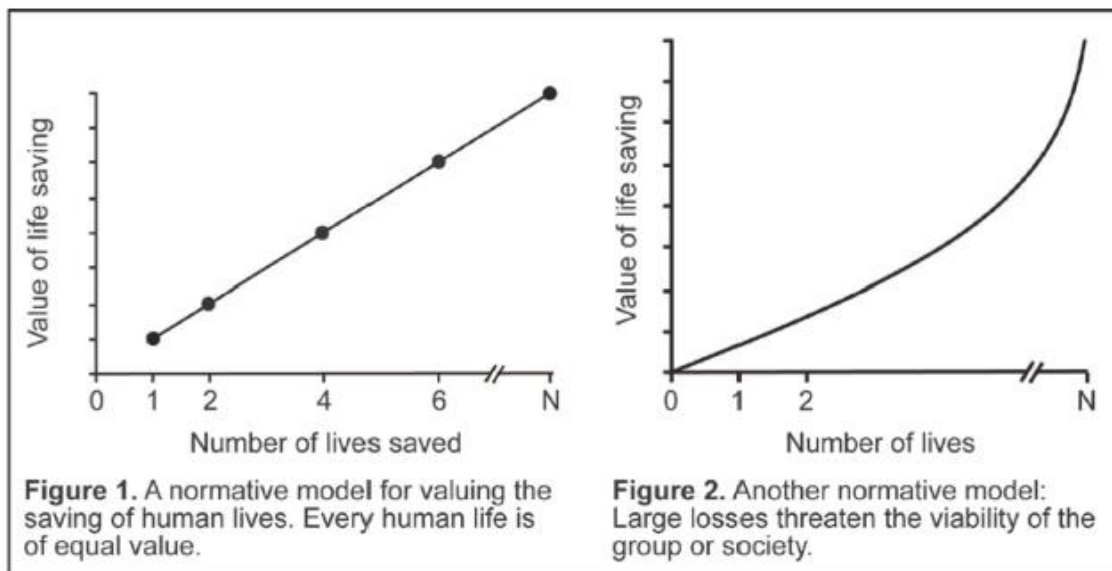
In the context of moral judgment, Haidt (2001) indicates that moral intuitions, that is comparable to fast and automatic process of thinking, *System 1*, precede moral judgments, which are deliberate. Specifically, he asserts that “... moral intuition can be defined as the sudden appearance in consciousness of a moral judgment, including an affective valence (good-bad, like-dislike) without any conscious awareness of having gone through steps of searching, weighing evidence, or inferring a conclusion. Moral intuition is therefore... akin to aesthetic judgment. One sees or hears about a social event, and one instantly feels approval or disapproval (2001: 818). This suggests that our moral judgments initially are formed not as a product of deliberate reasoning, as it was traditionally held since ancient moral philosophy, rather as a product of affect and intuition. Those moral intuitions, however, are short of accuracy with a potential to misjudgments unless they are supported by articulation or moral reasoning (Kahneman, 2003). To expound this claim, let us approach the question of how do we value human lives in *System 1* and *System 2* thinking?

How Do We Value Human Life?

The 1948 United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights started with this declaration:

“All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights (Article 1)”. This declaration afterwards becomes a cornerstone to most human rights documents and a subsequent policy framework in the modern era. It is directly stated that all human lives are equal, and if this is true, then the moral value of saving “N” number of human life is equal to “N” times the number of lives saved as it is suggested by Slovic *et al* (2001).

The declaration underscores the inherent value of human life as equal in dignity and right and is a great framework for resource allocation in humanitarian aid, public health, and other undertakings. However, this linear model of valuation of human life may fall short of explaining how people respond to identified victims and to a large-scale loss of life. In the context of identified victims, people tend to respond strongly as there might be a certain association with the identified victim. Whereas, in the time of genocide and mass atrocity, the loss of additional life will compromise the viability of the given community, and thus people should respond strongly. The declaration, even though it provided a clear moral principle in human valuation, the equal valuation of human lives, doesn’t take such kind of practical challenges of human community into consideration. This interplay continues to shape human rights and genocide discourse. Slovic *et al* (2001) put these challenges and real-world decision-making in the following graphic representations:



3

Picture 2: graph showing the value of life saving under normal circumstances and under mass atrocity.
Source Slovic *et al* (2001: 3).

Despite this linear valuation of human lives, research on psychophysics conducted by Gustav Fechner indicated a non-linear pattern, whenever the magnitude of the stimulus increases, the level of sensitivity among the recipient decreases. Fechner stated that “every given increment of stimulus causes an ever-decreasing increment in sensation in proportion as the stimulus grows larger, and that at high values of the stimulus it is no longer sensed, while on the other hand, at low values it may appear exceptionally strong” (1912:571). This argument assumes that people have a limited capacity to feel to large number of emotions that ultimately lead to insensitivity and consequently reduce the sense of urgency.

In addition to this, human beings are influenced by the power of novelty of events as well as the need to survive. An incident of whatever magnitude provokes empathy, compassion, and calls us to action. This same action prolonged in time becomes normalized, i.e., the abnormal becomes normal. This is because we need to change the situation, we need to get accustomed to it in order to avoid the prolongation of pain. Regarding intensity of suffering too, human beings cannot tolerate an intensity of tragedy for a longer period. This means, in order to avoid being overwhelmed, we desensitize ourselves to the events that shocked us in the beginning. This is more a survival mechanism than voluntary indifference to the situation. People react fast with the hope of reducing or changing the suffering of others but through time they see they cannot choose emotional numbing as mode of survival.

When the war in Tigray broke out in November 2020, Mekelle and other major cities were flooded with internally displaced people (IDPs) from Western and Northwestern Tigray, which was both unprecedented and profoundly moving. Schools and community centres became makeshift shelters, filled with families that had fled their homes, carrying nothing except the clothes they wore and traumatic stories. For many young Tigrayans of my age, this was the first time we witnessed such immense human suffering. Most of the IDPs lost their loved ones, children separated from their parents, whose homes were destroyed, women and girls who were raped, and some died of hunger while on their journey to safety.

These stories ignited an overwhelming sense of empathy and urgency, binding the residents in each of the cities that hosted IDPs in an extraordinary display of solidarity and compassion. It is very common among the community to bring food, clothes, and anything else they could offer. This first-time experience awakened a swift action to support the IDPs. This is a testimony on how

the affect we experienced as individuals and as a community fostered a sense of moral responsibility towards the affected community. Fast forward, most of the IDPs are still living in schools and community centers with ever-worsening conditions. Despite this, the compassion we initially displayed as a community is not any more there -if anything, we have become insensitive to the suffering of the IDPs. The reasons for this can range from being victims of the suffering ourselves to a lack of resources to support the IDPs. But we are witnessing a decline in the sensitivity toward what IDPs are going through. However, the fact is that we are witnessing a decline in the sensitivity toward what IDPs are going through.

Despite this claim, it is important to exercise caution when assigning moral judgment to emotional responses, particularly in contexts of extreme violence and survival. Emotions such as numbness, dissociation, or withdrawal among survivors as both direct victims of violence and indirect victims such as host communities, are often considered as automatic psychological coping mechanisms rather than conscious moral choices. Moral responsibility and potential moral failure, however, are more appropriately ascribed to two distinct groups: perpetrators of violence and observers with the capacity and mandate to prevent or respond, such as international institutions and bystander states. These actors may exhibit forms of moral disengagement, complicity, or intentional silence. For survivors, including internally displaced persons (IDPs) and the communities that host them, such as in the Tigray case, emotional numbing can be viewed as a natural response to trauma, not as a subject of moral evaluation. However, it is also worthwhile to include the host community if the capability to support is observed. Recognizing this distinction helps to avoid retraumatizing survivors through misplaced moral narratives and instead centers the ethical discussion where power, choice, and responsibility reside.

Inferred, psychologists provided explanations to this fundamental human psychology of diminishing insensitivity. The first one deals with what Fechner's explanation of an increment in stimuli will result in lower values to sensitivity (1912:571). Whereas Fetherstonhaugh *et al* indicated that people's willingness decreases whenever the people in need increases (1997: 284-285). This situation is called psychophysical numbing. According to Fetherstonhaugh *et al* "constant increases in the magnitude of a stimulus typically evoke less and less of a change in response. Applying this principle to the valuing of human life suggests that a form of psychophysical numbing may result from our inability to appreciate losses of life as they become more catastrophic, a phenomenon that could impair our ability to make consistent, equitable, and

wise decisions” (1997:284, Slovic, 2018:6)

Other studies assert that human beings cannot sustain strong emotions for a long time. Whether the worst tragedy or the highest joy in life cannot be maintained for long. Emotions normally go up with strong stimuli up to the peak, but they cannot remain on the peak even if the stimuli continue. This is evident in the lives of both lottery winners and those who experience profound loss. Despite the initial emotional highs or lows, both groups tend to return to their emotional baseline within a few months, illustrating that human nature cannot sustain intense emotions, whether positive or negative, for long periods

Taking this explanation into account in examining the question, “*How do we value human life?*”, Dillard (1999: 130–131) poses a lingering inquiry: “*At what number do other individuals blur for me?*” (quoted in Slovic et al., 2001). This unsettling question of the valuation of human life has a multidimensional explanation, yet assuming the fact that the limited capacity to feel and explicating the value of human life based on number presupposes that at one point in time, we value people’s lives not as feelings, but rather as statistics. Unfortunately, “All too often the numbers represent dry statistics, “human beings with the tears dried off,” that lack feeling and fail to motivate action (Slovic & Slovic, 2004).

This raised a profound philosophical question about the nature of human empathy, moral valuation, and the limitations of our emotional and cognitive capacities in the face of large-scale suffering. At its core, it interrogates the tension between our ethical ideals, such as the intrinsic value of every human life, and the psychological realities that constrain our ability to act in accordance with those ideals. Let us explore this in more detail.

The Valuation of Life and the Limits of Empathy

The psychophysical model described here reveals a troubling paradox: while we may espouse the belief that every life is of infinite or equal value, our emotional and psychological responses suggest otherwise. The model illustrates that our capacity to feel compassion or moral urgency diminishes as the scale of suffering increases and its duration is prolonged. This phenomenon can be understood through the lens of moral psychology and affective ethics, which examines how emotions shape our moral judgments and actions. The emotional numbing that we experience when things are overwhelming is not something directly related to moral decadence but rather the primacy of survival, which cannot be questioned in judgment.

The decline in emotional response from $N^7 = 1$ to $N = 2$ and beyond suggests that our moral sentiments are not scalable. This aligns with the philosophical critique of utilitarianism, which assumes that we can rationally aggregate the value of lives or suffering. In practice, however, our affective responses are not linear or additive; they are subject to what might be called emotional entropy, where the intensity of feeling dissipates as the number of victims grows. This raises questions about the reliability of emotions as a basis for moral action, especially in the face of large-scale atrocities.

Compassion Fatigue and the Blurring of Individuals

Annie Dillard's concern about "compassion fatigue" and the "blurring" of individuals points to a deeper existential and ethical dilemma. When confronted with mass suffering, the individuality of each victim is often lost, reducing them to an abstract number or statistics. This phenomenon can be analyzed through phenomenology, which studies the structures of experience and consciousness. From this perspective, the shift from $N = 1$ to $N = 2$ represents a collapse of the phenomenological richness of individual experience into a flattened, impersonal abstraction.

This blurring of individuals undermines the Kantian imperative to treat each person as an end in themselves, rather than as a means to an end or a mere number. It also reflects what Emmanuel Levinas might describe as a failure of ethical responsibility, which arises from the face-to-face encounter with the Other. When the Other becomes a faceless multitude, the ethical demand they place upon the victims is diluted, leading to what the passage describes as apathy and inaction.

Psychic Numbing and the Ethics of Inaction

Robert J. Lifton's concept of "psychic numbing" provides a psychological explanation for the ethical failure depicted in Figure 9. This numbing, while perhaps adaptive in extreme situations like the aftermath of Hiroshima, becomes morally problematic when it leads to indifference in the face of preventable suffering. Philosophically, this can be understood as a failure of moral imagination.

The passage suggests that this numbing is not merely a psychological quirk but a profound ethical challenge. It calls into question the adequacy of human nature for addressing large-scale moral

⁷ Number of people

crises, such as genocide. This resonates with Hannah Arendt's analysis of the banality of evil, where ordinary people become complicit in atrocities not through malice but through a failure to think and feel deeply about the consequences of their actions (or inactions).

As previously outlined, it is ethically imperative to distinguish between different categories of actors in the context of atrocity: the perpetrators, the observers (including international institutions with both the mandate and the capacity to prevent or respond), and the victims, i.e., both direct and indirect. The first two groups, those who commit violence and those who remain complicit through silence or inaction. Their failure, whether through deliberate cruelty or wilful indifference, implicates them in a breakdown of moral responsibility. In contrast, the victims of atrocity, including internally displaced persons (IDPs) and the communities that host them, inhabit an entirely different moral register. Emotional numbing, or silence among these groups, cannot be read as ethical failure, but rather involuntary psychological response to overwhelming trauma. However, this valuation will apply if the host community of any community develops a support structure and is unwilling to extend support. This could happen in protracted humanitarian crises. It is therefore critical to uphold a distinction between intentional moral disengagement and involuntary psychic defence.

Toward a Philosophy of Moral Engagement

The implications of this analysis are both critical and constructive. On the one hand, it exposes the fragility of our moral responses and the ease with which we can become complicit in systemic violence or neglect. On the other hand, it invites us to develop strategies for overcoming these limitations. This might involve cultivating moral imagination through art, literature, and storytelling, which can make the suffering of distant or numerous others more vivid and immediate. It might also involve institutional and structural reforms that compensate for the limitations of individual empathy, such as international legal frameworks or humanitarian systems.

Ultimately, the passage challenges us to confront the uncomfortable truth that our moral psychology is ill-suited to the scale of modern suffering. Yet, it also calls us to transcend these limitations, not by denying our humanity but by striving to pursue humanity's. In doing so, we might begin to align our emotional and ethical responses more closely with the ideals we profess to hold.

The Dual Role of Scholarship in Confronting Genocide: Moral Argumentation and the Creation of Presence

In addressing the profound moral challenge of genocide, I have identified two critical roles for scholars and activists. The first is to foster moral argumentation that transcends mere statistical representation. When we present the realities of genocide, our discourse should not be confined to cold numerical figures or abstract magnitudes. While numbers may convey scale, they often fail to capture the human suffering behind them. Instead, we must strive to go beyond quantification, integrating moral imagination and emotional resonance into our narratives. This approach ensures that our arguments operate not only on a rational level but also on an affective one, compelling us to act and sustain our engagement over time.

To achieve this, we must cultivate a form of moral argumentation that intertwines reason and emotion. On the one hand, we need reasoning to construct coherent, persuasive arguments that challenge indifference and justify action. On the other hand, we must harness affect, the emotional force that drives us to care and act. However, sustaining this affective engagement is no small task, especially in the face of the numbing effect of large numbers. This is where the concept of presence, drawn from phenomenology, becomes essential. Presence refers to the vivid, immediate experience of reality, and in the context of genocide, it means making the suffering of individuals palpable and urgent.

Scholars play a pivotal role in creating this sense of presence. Our work should not merely deliver evidence; it must also evoke the feelings, the humanity, and the urgency of the situation. By doing so, we can counteract the dangerous tendency to reduce individuals to mere statistics, stripping them of their dignity and the gravity of their suffering. Every time we present data or evidence, we must be creative in fostering a sense of immediacy, a reminder that real people are dying, suffering, and enduring unimaginable horrors. This urgency is not just for ourselves but for the international community, which often remains in a state of moral slumber.

Here, I draw a parallel to the ancient philosopher Socrates, who saw himself as a gadfly, a persistent irritant to the Athenian state, stirring it from complacency. In our time, scholars must take on a similar role, acting as gadflies to the international community. We must awaken it from its deep slumber, constantly reminding it of the atrocities unfolding and the moral imperative to act. As Edmund Burke famously warned, "The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for

good men to do nothing." If the international community remains indifferent, it is not only a failure of politics but also a failure of moral imagination and scholarly responsibility.

To achieve this awakening, we must employ a multifaceted approach. First, we must change beliefs and perceptions. Like Socrates, who challenged the assumptions of his time, we must confront the apathy and indifference that allow genocide to persist. This requires not only rational argumentation but also the cultivation of moral imagination—the ability to see and feel the suffering of others as if it were our own. Second, we must exercise imagination to create and sustain the emotional engagement necessary for sustained action. Art, literature, and storytelling can play a crucial role here, as they have the power to humanize statistics and make distant suffering feel immediate.

Finally, we must artfully construct and calibrate images and narratives that resonate deeply with our audiences. These narratives should not only inform but also move people to action. They must convey the horror of genocide without reducing it to a mere abstraction or number. In this regard, I am reminded of the words of Holocaust survivor Josef Herzberg, who said, "There were not six million Jews murdered; there was one murder, six million times." This statement encapsulates the essence of what we must strive for: to see the individual behind the number, the humanity behind the statistic.

Even though it is not the primary purpose of this article, it is worthwhile reflecting on an often overlooked yet critical dimension of Ethiopia's conflict and post-conflict landscape, which is the role of scholars and academic institutions. Historically, the academic community has played an ambiguous role in political and societal developments. Rather than serving as independent voices of reason and conscience, many scholars have at times aligned themselves with dominant political narratives, acting as intellectual extensions of ruling regimes (Gramsci, Antonio, 1971). This alignment, whether out of conviction or fear of reprisal, has contributed to a vacuum of critical thought and ethical debate in moments when society needed it most.

This phenomenon underscores the urgent need to advocate for the autonomy of educational institutions and the protection of academic freedom. An independent academic sector can serve as a moral compass for society, offering critical analysis, shaping informed public discourse. Without institutional independence, however, scholars remain vulnerable to political manipulation or compelled silence, leaving a critical gap in the moral dialogue.

In conclusion, the fight against genocide/mass atrocity demands more than just data and evidence. It requires a profound moral and emotional engagement, academic freedom sustained by the creation of presence, and the relentless pursuit of justice. Scholars, as modern-day gadflies, have a unique responsibility to awaken the international community, challenge its indifference, and inspire action. By integrating reason, affect, and moral imagination, we can deepen our understanding of mass atrocity and strengthen our collective capacity to confront its recurrence with greater ethical vigilance, historical awareness, and a more responsive moral framework.

Conclusion

The 21st century has been marked by unparalleled violence, with mass atrocities and human rights abuses unfolding in regions such as Ukraine, Syria, Haiti, Myanmar, Sudan, Palestine, Israel, and Ethiopia. These crises reveal a disturbing disregard for international human rights law and the erosion of the global structures established after World War II to prevent such horrors. As UN Human Rights Chief Volker Türk warns, the world is at a “dangerous moment in history,” with conflicts and human rights violations reaching a “deafening crescendo.”

The failure to respond effectively to genocide and mass atrocities raises profound moral and psychological questions. Despite the universal capacity for empathy, evidenced by moments of shared human feeling, mass atrocity/genocide continues to recur. This paradox underscores the need to examine the psychological and philosophical mechanisms that enable indifference. To address this, I propose a psycho-moral approach that integrates insights from psychology and moral philosophy, focusing on two key questions: How do we feel about suffering, and how ought we to act in response?

Psychological research, particularly the *affect-as-information hypothesis*, reveals that emotions play a central role in shaping our judgments and actions. However, our capacity to feel is limited, leading to *psychic numbing*, a phenomenon where large-scale suffering becomes abstract, reducing individuals to statistics and diminishing our moral urgency. This numbing is exacerbated by the dual-process model of thinking, where System 1 (intuitive, emotional responses) often overrides System 2 (deliberative, rational analysis). Philosophically, this aligns with critiques of utilitarianism, which assumes a linear valuation of human lives and highlights the tension between our ethical ideals and psychological realities.

To counteract this, scholars and activists must foster *moral argumentation* that humanizes

suffering, creating a sense of *presence* that makes atrocities vivid and immediate. This involves integrating moral imagination, storytelling, and art to evoke empathy and sustain emotional engagement. Scholars must also act as modern-day gadflies, challenging global indifference and advocating for justice. By combining psychological insights with moral reasoning, we can address the mechanisms that enable genocide and inspire meaningful action.

Ultimately, the prevention of mass atrocity/genocide demands more than data and evidence; it requires a profound moral and emotional engagement. As Josef Herzberg, a Holocaust survivor, reminds us, “There were not six million Jews murdered; there was one murder, six million times.” We must see the individual behind the number, honour their humanity, and act to ensure that such horrors are neither forgotten nor repeated. Through independent scholar-activism, we can awaken the international community from its moral slumber and uphold the vow of “never again.”

References

- Arendt, H. (1994). *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A report on the banality of evil*. Penguin Books.
- Barrett, L. F., & Salovey, P. (Eds.). (2002). *The wisdom in feeling: Psychological processes in emotional intelligence*. Guilford Press.
- Dallaire, R. (2005). *Shake hands with the devil: The failure of humanity in Rwanda*. Carroll & Graf.
- Dandeker, Christopher. (2011). “Genocide and Mass Killing: Origins, Contexts and Consequences.” *Revista de Științe Politice și Relații Internaționale*, 8(3), 49–66.
- Fechner, G. T. (1912). *Elements of psychophysics*. In B. Rand (Ed.), *The classical psychologists* (pp. 562–572). Houghton Mifflin. (Original work published 1860)
- Gramsci, A. (1971). *Selections from the prison notebooks of Antonio Gramsci* (Q. Hoare & G. N. Smith, Eds. & Trans.). International Publishers.
- Haidt, J. (2001). *The emotional dog and its rational tail: A social intuitionist approach to moral judgment*. *Psychological Review*, 108 (4), 814–834.
<https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295X.108.4.814>
- Heinrich Böll Stiftung. (2016). “Why Genocide Occurs.”
<https://kh.boell.org/en/2016/10/06/why-genocide-occurs>
- Hogarth, R. M. (2001). *Educating intuition*. University of Chicago Press.
- Hume, D. (1751). *An enquiry concerning the principles of morals*. [Author/publisher not specified].
- Kant, I. (1785). *Groundwork of the metaphysics of morals*. [Author/publisher not specified].
- LeDoux, J. (1996). *The emotional brain: The mysterious underpinnings of emotional life*. Simon & Schuster.

- Moghaddam, Fathali M. (2022). Psychology of Genocide. [Preprint/working paper] https://dlwqtxts1xzle7.cloudfront.net/80603921/Psychology_of_Genocide-libre.pdf
- Nietzsche, F. (1887). *On the genealogy of morality* (W. Kaufmann & R. J. Hollingdale, Trans.). [Publisher not specified].
- Power, Samantha. (2002). “A Problem from Hell”: America and the Age of Genocide. <https://samanthapower.com/books/a-problem-from-hell-america-and-the-age-of-genocide/>
- Schwarz, N., & Clore, G. L. (1988). *How do I feel about it? Informative functions of affective states*. In K. Fiedler & J. Forgas (Eds.), *Affect, cognition, and social behavior* (pp. 44–62). Hogrefe International.
- Singer, P. (1981). *The expanding circle: Ethics and sociobiology*. Farrar, Straus & Giroux.
- Slovic, P. (2007). *Psychic numbing and genocide*. *Judgment and Decision Making*, 2 (2), 79–95.
- Smith, A. (1759). *The theory of moral sentiments*. [Author/publisher not specified].
- Stanovich, K. E., & West, R. F. (2000). *Individual differences in reasoning: Implications for the rationality debate*. *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 23 (5), 645–726. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0140525X00003435>
- United Nations General Assembly. (1948). *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>
- Vollhardt, Johanna Ray & Staub, Ervin. (2013). “Moral Exclusion of Victims and Bystanders: The Role of Moral Justifications in the Perpetration of Genocide and Mass Killing.” *Journal of Social Issues*, 69(1), 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.1111/josi.12000>

Being Human, Existence, and Enlightenment in Classical Ethiopian Philosophy

Eyasu Berento Assefa⁸

Abstract

What is being human? Is a human being a bare static natural phenomenon determined by his essence and or a dynamic reality of transformation? Zār'a Ya'eqob's prayer "O my Lord and my creator, who endowed me with reason, make me intelligent..." seems a clue that the being human is a journey. "O man, if you want to cast off the man of old, adjust your body to the narrower door that leads to life, and you will become a new man" Fisalg^wos advises the rejuvenation of the human self. In the invitation to The Book of The Wise Philosophers, the 15th Century Monk, Aba Michael stresses the values of the wisdom of the philosophers. Nothing in the world so precious and marvelous can afford it; "it is a thing of value", the development of conscience, for our enlightenment, the friend for our lifetime consolation. Being wise and enlightenment are the natural and nurtured conditions of being human. How the lines from the Ethiopic version of the Oedipus story (The Life and Maxims of Skändäs) flesh light on the philosophical questions of being human, existence and enlightenment? The human being endowed with the immortal soul and moral responsibility is exalted above irrational animals; but this is true only when he lives an examined life (Wäldä Həywät). Another contribution to our query in search of genuine human in Ethiopian philosophy. This article is a philosophical deliberation on the personalist view of the world, human being, the meaning of life and human enlightenment from the pages of Sumner's 'Classical Ethiopian Philosophy'.

Key Words: Being Human, CEP, Claude Sumner, Enlightenment and Social Transformation, Personalist World.

Introduction

On the basis of the enthusiastic reaction to the totality of the Ethiopian "philosophical" experience I believe it would be unfair to deprive the modern audience from the richness of Ethiopia's wisdom, as it would be to limit oneself to the expression of Ethiopia's original approach to rationalism (Sumner, 1985, p. 10).

Claude Sumner had an enthusiastic reaction to the totality of the richness of Ethiopia's philosophical wisdom. As one of the prominent figures in the area, he has made a great contribution to Ethiopian studies, Ethiopian philosophy studies and philosophical studies in Ethiopia.⁹ And his writings on philosophy and their insightful introductions are great sources for Ethiopian studies.

This article analyzes selected quotes from Classical Ethiopian Philosophy (hereafter CEP) on basic questions related to what it means to be human, existence in social reality, and enlightenment as a rational being endowed with the ability to reason and freedom. The focus of the article is on the

⁸ Educator and Researcher of Philosophy @ Kotebe University of Education and other HEIs; Ph.D. Candidate of Philosophy at Addis Ababa University. Email: shambleber@gmail.com

⁹ The phrase "Ethiopian philosophy studies" refers to the philosophical explorations and examinations philosophical treasures and history of ideas in the intellectual traditions of Ethiopian history whereas philosophical studies in Ethiopia refers to much broader philosophical discourse that also comprises the study of foreign philosophical traditions in Ethiopia and by Ethiopians in the academia. We can make a distinction between Ethiopian philosophy and philosophy in Ethiopia (Assefa, 2024).

nature of the human as a duty bounded moral agent in the social, ethical, economic, and political constituents, and the development of human wisdom.¹⁰ The central thesis of this paper is that Ethiopian personalist view of reality and human beings provides ample sources on the study of human nature, the purpose of life and human transformation from the lower condition of existence to the higher as opposed to the individualistic Western vision of being human and instrumental reason to manipulate nature.

The article has four main parts, along with the conclusion: Part I is a summary on the life and works of Claude Sumner and his contributions to Ethiopian studies and Ethiopian philosophy studies¹¹. Part II is a summary of *Classical Ethiopian Philosophy* and an explanation of the nature of Ethiopian philosophy and its primary sources. Part III deals with the very title of the article, an examination into the philosophical views on being human, existence and enlightenment from the point of view of CEP. And Part IV is a reflection on some characteristics of Ethiopian philosophy which are different from Western thought tempered by Sumner's comment that the 'Ethiopian world is a personalist one while the Western world is one of things.' At the end, a conclusion in the form of the way forward is presented on the basic themes discussed with a suggestion on further study of Ethiopian philosophy and its contributions to knowledge production, advancing human wisdom, and the philosophical studies in contemporary Ethiopian.

I.

Claude Sumner and His Contribution to Ethiopian Studies

"I am Canadian by birth but Ethiopian by choice." (Sumner)

Claude Sumner is one of the prominent figures in Ethiopian philosophy studies. He publicized the oral and written philosophy of Ethiopia in contemporary academia. By virtue of his unreserved commitment to the study of Ethiopian philosophy, he indulged in academic exercise to publicize what is called Ethiopian philosophy and its sources, manifestations, and nature. He necessarily penetrates the linguistic, cultural, and religious confines of diversified ethnic groups and comes up

¹⁰ Wisdom is one of the central themes in Ethiopian philosophy and social reality. "In Ethiopian philosophy, wisdom is expressed in both the oral and written form" (Kelbessa, 2022).

¹¹ The initial draft of this paper was presented on July 8th, 2019, in the conference organized by the Department of Philosophy, in his 100th birthday anniversary and the 7th year of his death commemoration. (Addis Ababa University).

with the fundamental unity that brings about the beautiful whole of “greater Ethiopia” (Levine, 1974).

Who is Sumner, and why does he devote himself to such a tough commitment?

Born on July 10, 1919, in Saskatoon, Canada, and died on June 24, 2012, Sumner lived and taught philosophy in Addis Ababa University for about half a century. He produced voluminous works pertaining to the philosophical treasures (wisdom) of Ethiopia in the written and oral sources.¹² According to Presbey and Mclean (2012), Sumner is one of the great contributors to African Philosophy. His great contribution is seen as a response to the stereotyping against Africa as a land of no written legacy by debunking the classical written Ethiopian philosophy in Geez language. “His collection *Classical Ethiopian Philosophy* [...], filled as it was with texts originally in Ge’ez, translated into English, debunked the stereotypes of Africa as a land without a history of written philosophical texts” (Presbey and Mclean, 2012 p. viii).

According to Messay, he “indeed show[ed] us that there is more to Ethiopia than civil wars, dictatorships, and famines.” Specially as “a good friend of Ethiopia” he “devoted so much energy and commitment to presenting to the world an unusual and exciting face of Ethiopia” (Messay quoted in Kelbessa, 2022, p. 253). Odera Oruka, well-known Kenyan Philosopher, described his place in Ethiopian philosophy as “the combination of Plato and Aristotle of Ethiopia. What he has done to Ethiopia in the field of philosophy can, in all fairness, be as important and original as what Plato and Aristotle did to Greece” (Oruka quoted in Kelbessa, 2022, p. 253). Sumner will be remembered for “his great and incisive intellectual insights, enthusiasm, sense of social justice, deep interest in both his research subject and the people he met and his cheerful and outgoing personality. Sumner died, he also lives” (Kelbessa, 2022, P. 257).

His comments on the history, language, culture, religion and anthropology of Ethiopia are enlightening and open the doors for further studies. As the one who describes himself as “I am Canadian by birth but Ethiopian by choice”, his careful analysis of the socio-political, cultural and

¹² Among his main works, three volume books on the philosophy of man, *Classical Ethiopian Philosophy*, five series volumes on Ethiopian philosophy, three volumes on the Oromo Wisdom Literature with an addition on the anthology of Oromo oral literature, one on Ethiopian philosophy of man, and numerous articles on Ethiopian philosophy, its contribution to African philosophy studies, Ethiopian culture, religion (e.g., on Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity’s liturgy), history and the like. He “authored forty books, and more than 200 articles, book chapters and reviews covering such diverse subjects as theology, Ethiopian philosophy, African philosophy, philosophical anthropology, history of philosophy, poetry, plays, etc” (Kelbessa, 2022, p. 254).

religious lived experiences and realities in Ethiopian soil cannot be done with random and personal conclusions. That is why I reasonably opine that his contribution to the Ethiopian humanities studies cannot be easily denied. A few of them are presented here as examples.

In his volume III of Ethiopian philosophy, (Sumner, 1978, Pp. 9-12), he gives us a brief discussion on the philosophy of naming and the place of language in Ethiopian world view. In his argument, the personal names in Ethiopia are not mere differentiating tools between individuals. They rather portray the historical, situational and futurity of the bearer of the name as a person with certain social potential. Naming and language in general are not mere abstractions as manifestations of thought. Instead, they are the responses to the voices of nature. “For the Semitic Ethiopians, as for the Hebrews, the name is regarded not as a mere designation to distinguish several individuals of a species from one another, but, in a manner, as identical with the thing named” (Sumner, 1978, p. 11).

The Ethiopian considers himself as a moral agent in the workings of things and a promoter of history as a responsible subject to respond to the things, unlike the Greek, who reflects. “The word [*qal*], therefore, is not simply the translation of a thought: it is an act of power, of mastery, of authority; it is efficiency.” Unlike the Greek *logos*, “which is a thought word”, the Ethiopic *qal* “is a word that destines one's course of events and hence that engages a destiny, expressing not what things are in themselves, but that for which they are, what they will become, their *raison d'etre*. It is an action-word” (Ibid. P. 11). Naming and language in Ethiopia entail a thoughtful characterization of reality to which man is its attached promoter, authoritative and effective agent. “Undoubtedly language expresses the way the [Ethiopian] situates himself in relation to things” (Ibid. P. 11).¹³

His discussion on the general historical evolution of multicultural, multilingual, and multiethnic Ethiopia is one of the thoughtful interventions of a philosopher in Ethiopian Studies. On “ethnic origins”, he wrote that “as there has been so much racial intermixing, racial identifications are limited [of] use in Ethiopia.” He concludes that, “Ethiopia has been able to preserve and perfect a

¹³ This invites reflection and further study on the philosophy of language and its relationship with the natural reality and social phenomena in the Ethiopian culture.

unique culture born of the ancient encounter and the slow fusion of [...] equally gifted peoples” from different parts of current Ethiopia (Sumner, 1985, p. 5).¹⁴

According to his analysis of the evolution of Ethiopic (*Gə'əz*) literature, its beginning dates to the first years of King *Ezana* and extends to the 19th century. In a seemingly reductionist view¹⁵, but of tending to the focus of his study, what had evolved through these literary periods was philosophy itself *from wisdom to rationalism*. Around the end of his general introduction, he devoted about three pages to a brief discussion of the five books collected under the common heading of the very title *Classical Ethiopian Philosophy*.

But what is the common odor of Ethiopian-ness on these texts?

Before addressing this question in section II, one more contribution of Sumner in Ethiopian philosophy study should be noted here: the methodology by which Ethiopian philosophy can be studied. Setting the method will be more important to effectively understand the nature of Ethiopian thought in the form of popular and collective wisdom, written and oral, and original and translated. “Ethiopia, therefore harbours both types of philosophy: oral and written, traditional and radical, sapiential and critical, popular and personal. It is the land of diverse expressions of philosophy and the birthplace of modern thought” (Sumner, 1998, p. 333).

To approach such a variety of sources of philosophy and transcend into the underpinning foundation of philosophy in Ethiopian soil, Sumner proposes two methodologies: a strict and vast interpretation of written texts and oral literature. By strict interpretation, he speaks of the direct understanding of the philosophical content of a text. The two treatises treated here are to be studied through this methodology, and the remaining three, along with the oral literature, are texts under vast interpretation.¹⁶

¹⁴ The historians (e.g., Tekeletsadik Mekuria, 1951), travelers (e.g., De Abbadie, 2009) and sociologists (e.g., Levine, 1974) agree on this claim and the way by which the people of Ethiopia developed communality through several years of interaction due to trade, intermarriage, migration, settlement, job seeking (Dessalegn Rahmato, 2009) and related mobility of people from one part of Ethiopia to the other.

¹⁵ His analysis of the evolution of Geez literature is based on the chronology of the written philosophy texts. Viewed from the thematic content he is dealing with, he is not reductionist. But considering the comprehensive contents of the Geez literature that comprises extension from purely religious dogmas to hagiography, astronomy, history and chronicles, philosophy, law and traditional medication, his brief discussion seems quite generalized.

¹⁶ Vast interpretation is extracting the philosophical content in the practical lives of the society, their culture and parables, storytelling, oral literature, religious views, rituals, folk wisdom, Geez Qine, contextually adapted texts and the like (Teodros Kiros, 2015). In this sense philosophy can be exhibited as “an integral part of social and political life: not as the isolated speculations of remarkable individuals, but as both an effect and a cause of the character of the

Though these contributions are well acknowledged, it doesn't mean that Sumner works are not liable for critics. "Whereas the Western world, the Greek in particular, has a tendency to consider things as they are in their impersonal objectivity, the African world, the Ethiopian in particular, is clearly anthropocentric" (Sumner, 1986, p. 17). This seems not to be a well-researched conclusion, or else Sumner is required to clarify what 'anthropocentric' means.¹⁷ A scope cannot allow me to deal with it here, a separate study is underway to reflect on where Sumner goes wrong.

II.

Classical Ethiopian Philosophy (CEP)

"Without the latter developments of Ethiopian philosophy, The Fisalg^{wos} is deprived of its significance; without The Fisalg^{wos}, [the written] Ethiopian philosophy is deprived of roots" (Sumner, 1982, p. 77).

There are five different written texts under the title of CEP. Three of them are translated texts, two are originally written by the 17th Century Ethiopian philosopher Zär'a Ya'eqob and his disciple Wäldä Həywät. For those who read all the texts, at least two questions must come to mind. First, by what criteria are the translated texts classified as Ethiopian philosophy? Second, how could the translated texts be subject to varied interpretations from religious motives (Fisalg^{wos}) to collections of sayings (the book of the wise philosophers) and personal maxims of *Skändəs* and the purely original *Hatätas* fall under the same title of philosophy?

As for the first question, the translations are not literal. They are highly contextualized, where the creative intervention of the translator gives them the print of the Ethiopian original.¹⁸

various communities in which different systems flourished." (Russell, 1945, p. ix.). This vast interpretation helps us to discern the philosophical content and patterns of order in the comprehensive life forms and social activities of the people. Levine invites scholars to interpretation of the philosophy and meaning of life in the life of the people: "The scholar's job is of course to transcend such medley of impressions and to discern the patterns of order through which such details are bound together in a living whole." (1972, pp. ix-x).

¹⁷ In his comparison, he claimed that "The Greek takes as a starting point the world of external reality which is distinct and measurable. The Ethiopian Does not break away from the world in which he lives. He does not disengage himself from it, he does not stand out; he is part of it. His starting point is within himself, in his own personal experience. [...] the Ethiopian universe is that of human beings and human life" (p. 17). I can rather argue that, unlike the western anthropocentric vision of the world, the ethiopian view is ecocentric and a theocentric perception of reality. The human person is a mediator between creation and the Creator. The will of God and continual nurturing of Divine Grace play central roles in human existence, the spiritual and physical growth of the human person, the harmony within the social reality and the ecosystem. According to Eguale (2003), St. Yared's place in the intellectual tradition of Ethiopia is a signboard to the theocentric vision of reality.

¹⁸ The concern on careful translation of texts goes beyond the language fluency of the translator. They rather give due attention to his/her ability to integrate and genuinely contextualize the real essence of the text to be translated. The Preface (*meqdem*) to *The First Book of Monks* (Mar Yisehaq) reads as follows: "ከጽሐፍ ወደ ዓረብ የሚመለስው ጠፍቶ ይኖር ነበር፤ በኋላ ዘመን ኒክፋር የሚባል ሊቀ ጳጳስ፤ ስምዖን ሚካኤል የሚባሉ ኤጲስቶሎጶች ረብሀ ጥቅም እንዳለው የሚመለስላቸው አጥተው ይኖሩ ነበር፤

Ethiopians never translate literally: they adapt, modify, add, subtract. A translation therefore bears a typical Ethiopian stamp: although the nucleus of what is translated is foreign to Ethiopia the way it is assimilated, and transformed into an indigenous reality is typically Ethiopian (Sumner, 1985, p. 51).¹⁹

As for the second question, the genesis of the Ethiopian broader worldview imprinted in the texts is one of the common features that make all the family members of Classical Ethiopian Philosophy. As for the rationale of Sumner's classification, the following words are quoted from the same author,

Zär'a Ya'eqob's thought claims to be original, and for the written literature of the 17th century Ethiopia that we know, it certainly is. But the images are not original. The offshoots are personal adventures into free space, but the stem is deeply rooted in Ethiopian soil (1978, p. 61).

This Ethiopian soil is the cultural background for “philosophy always presupposes and grounds its reflexive and reflective discourse in and on the actuality of a lived historico-cultural and political milieu—a specific horizon” (Serequeberhan, 1994, p. 2). After these notes, let's now see the summary of the texts that show “more than twelve years of literary production” and variety of evolutions (Sumner, 1985, p. 7).

The first text is the *Fisalg^wos*, a symbolic representation of animals, plants, stones, and minerals intended to teach humans about moral righteousness, enlightenment, personal development and purification besides the biblical themes on the resurrection and crucifixion of Jesus Christ for human salvation. Human beings are called upon to imitate nature for their religious perfection and enlightenment. Viewed from the vantage point of philosophy, the text is mainly axiological, focusing on moral goodness. The primary objective of the symbols is to cultivate the good

ቋንቋ ያወቀ እንደሆነ ግብር ያልገባ ያልተማረ ይሆናል፤ ግብረ ገብ የተማረ ቢሆን ቋንቋ የማያውቅ ይሆናል። ኋላ ግብር የገባ የተማረ ቋንቋ የሚያውቅ ዲያቆን ተገኝቶ እሱ መልሶላቸዋል።” “It was not early translated from Hebrew to Greek since there was no right person to do so. Popes named Nikfar and Simon Michale recognized its value but cannot find one to translate it. Those who know the language are not lerned and wise enough; and those who were wise cannot know the language. Latter on, one diacon who is wise and fluent in the language transtaled it.” (own translaion). This requirement is applicable in the Ethiopian tradition of translating foreign texts.

¹⁹ For additional comments on the art of contextual adaptation of the Ethiopians, See Levine (1974), Sumner (1985), and Messay Kebede (1999). “Levine calls the Ethiopian response to foreign influence a “creative incorporation”, which is not “passive and literal borrowing” (p. 64-65). This form of contextual adaptation is not specific to literature, but is also apparent in religion, art, and architecture. (p. 65-68). Additional empirical example is the way the first legal document (the traditional constitution, the Feteha Negest composed in the time of Emperor Zär'a Ya'eqob, 15th C) integrated into Ethiopian reality (Abera Jenbere, 2006 pp. 160-168) (Assefa, 2024, p. 128).

character and wisdom of humans, and this content can be discerned by the vast analytic interpretation of the scholar.²⁰

The second text, *The Book of the Philosophers*²¹, is a collection of sayings and, quotes from the known (e.g., Socrates, Aristotle, and Plato) and unknown philosophers, (under the common phrase “the wise man said” or “one of the philosophers said”), short stories (the book of Hikar the Wise) and other biblical and popular sayings from influential figures including emperors. This book comprises moral, political, and social claims that are intended to cultivate human behavior and serve as advice for good conduct, social harmony, justice, and enlightenment. The thoughtful introduction of the translator, Abba Michael, is one of the pioneers in acclaiming and appraising the value of philosophy and the wisdom of philosophers in Ethiopian history. He considered the words of the wise philosophers as something worthwhile that:

pleases the heart of man and strengthens his conscience. ... Its excellence surpasses gold and silver and precious stones and all nature. [...] It is the paradise of happiness, carried in your chest conceived in your heart and adjusted to your conscience... (In Sumner, 1985, p. 63, emphasis mine).

The third text is The Life and Maxims of *Skändəs*, the Ethiopic or Ge’ez version of the Oedipus Story. It is comprised of three sections: section one is a biography of *Skändəs* the wise and two sections on series of questions on cosmology, human nature, God, natural phenomena, human behavior, the nature of angels, knowledge, wisdom, human soul – mind, and the like, summing up to a total of 163 questions addressed by the short maxims of the wise man, *Skändəs*, known as *Eskindes* in Ethiopian tradition.

The remaining two texts are the two Treatises (Hatäta²²) of 17th century Ethiopian Philosopher Zär’a Ya’eqob and his disciple Wäldä Həywät. These are the most popular texts in Ethiopian

²⁰ Tewodros Kiros’ (2015) exemplary interpretation of EXPLANATION VIII about hipwopas (p. 25), third discourse of EXPLANATION I about the lion (in Sumner, 1985, p. 19), and Discourse XLII about diamond (p. 46) give us clue on how to approach the symbolic representation of images in the book.

²¹ The Amharic version translated from Geez by Liqe Mezemiran Moges Equebe Giorgis in 1953 E.C under the heading of *Angare Felaḥa (Yefelasfoch Anegager)* (The Sayings of Philosophers) is one of the contributions to modern Ethiopian literature and philosophy studies. The translator’s own preface on the interpretation of Dreams is one of the interesting contributions to the psychological and metaphysical interpretations of dreams (pp. 1-5).

²² Hatäta is one of the methodological contributions of the Ethiopian intellectual tradition. *Zär’a Ya’eqob* and *Wäldä Həywät* properly used this method to examine truth about natural reality and public discourse. *Hatäta* means “to question bit by bit, piece-meal; to search into or through, to investigate accurately; to examine; to inspect” (Sumner). *Hatäta* is aided by another Ethiopic method of inquiry, *hasasa*, which means “‘to search for one who is absent,’ *quaerere absentem*. When it has passed to invisible things, it came to mean, ‘to search,’ for them, ‘to follow eagerly,’ ‘to reach towards,’ ‘to be eager,’ as Latin *sectari*, *petere*, *studere*.” (Kelbessa, 2022, p. 246). The two terms (Hatäta

philosophy, translated by different authors and their different contents are analyzed by scholars from philosophy and other disciplines. While Zär'a Ya'eqob's Hatäta is more abstract and personal reflection on metaphysical issues with social and political critiques, Wäldä Həywät's emphasizes on the practical and social aspects still retaining the metaphysical influences from his teacher.

But what is the central theme and primary concern of the texts? What is the common Ethiopian worldview that is portrayed by all the texts under discussion? In the forthcoming section, we will focus on one central theme, namely being human and the existential conditions of personal development as a social potential and purification of the human in acquiring wisdom.

III.

Being Human, Existence and Enlightenment: Lessons from CEP

"inquiry [Hatäta] is the door through which we have access to wisdom, and reason [Libuna] the key God gave us, with which we can open this door and enter the hall of His secretes and share the treasures of His wisdom" (ሐተታ አንቀጽ ጥበብ፣ ወልብናስ መርኖ ለአንቀጽ ጥበብ) (Wäldä Həywät, in Sumner 1985, p. 255).

As Sumner argued, the Ethiopian worldview is the personalist one not in the sense of anthropocentrism, but to mean that humans are part and parcel of the universe, responsible for the well-being of its processes. In most cases, the theocentric orientation of reality and human stewardship responsibility in the universe are stressed where humans are partakers of social harmony and cosmic integrity.

He characterized the Ethiopian world as a personalist one where the Ethiopian Semite “does not separate himself from the world he lives in. He is not detached, he does not stand outside that world, he is part of it. [...] He does not attempt to express what is in his mind, he simply tries to evoke it” (p. 62). Sumner further argues that the base and the summit of thought in Ethiopian philosophy is the human element, the personal nature of relational reality.

This characterization of the philosophical elements of Zär'a Ya'eqob and Wäldä Həywät clues the intellectual background and their true genesis on the Ethiopian soil. For the discussion at hand, this plays two interrelated roles. On the one hand, it accrues the weight of the conclusion on the

and *Andamta - Tirguaamme*) have a Ge'ez origin and specific philosophical aspects. Hatäta, encapsulates a particular means of searching for the truth and examining claims while hasasa is looking for the hidden mysteries.

authenticity of *Zär'a Ya'eqob* to be a 17th Century Ethiopian thinker.²³ On the other hand, it shows the communality of thought on the contents and emphasis of CEP, the “broader cultural background where the human element is both the base and the summit”, the very concern of this article, being human, existence, and enlightenment in the personalist worldview in Ethiopia. The translation and the original texts all mainly focus on the personalist vision of being human. Let us take empirical examples in each text.²⁴

1. *The Fisalg'os*

In the *Fisalg'os*, the symbolic use of the natural entities like animals, plants and minerals is intended to depict theological ideals and moral elevation in the human person. Such creative incorporation of the human and non-human phenomena, where nature is considered as a guide—teacher to the wisdom of God²⁵ is vividly presented in the total of XLVIII (48) discourses. Let's see a few examples which have relevance to our discussion,

a. *About the lizard (Explanation II):*

As the lizard ages, its eyes grow dim and it becomes so blind that it does not even see the light of the sun. It searches for a wall exposed to the East and clings to it. When the sun warms up, its eyes open and it is restored to health. It does this quite naturally (Sumner, 1985, p. 20).

In the time of ignorance and sin, the human is called upon to search for the Lord, redeemer, and ask His wisdom and freedom. The wall is a spiritual ladder that enables humans to be nearer to the Lord and have access to the illuminating divine light. In such process of purification, “the eye of your heart will become luminous in the likeness of Him” (Sumner, 1985, p. 20). This clearly explains the personal transformation of the man of wisdom in the Ethiopian spiritual vision of the world and human life.

b. *About the Eagle (Explanation VI):*

The Eagle metaphor resembles the image of the Lizard. Using the eagle who searches for the sun scorching the wings and veiling of its eyes and an adventure into the depths of the lake plunging three

²³ The debate on the authorship of the two treatises is one of the controversies among scholars. See Sumner (1976) *Ethiopian Philosophy Vol. II: The treatise of Zär'a Ya'eqob and of Wäldä Həywät Text and Authorship*. Commercial Printing Press, Addis Ababa University (pp. 61-275); And Eyasu (2010 E.C) “ተግባራዊ ፍልስፍና (Practical Philosophy) በ17^{ኛው} ክፍለ ዘመን (h.h) ኢትዮጵያ፡- ሐተታ ወልደ ሕይወት እንፍራንዛዊ” በአባይ የባህል ማዕከል 3ኛው አገር አቀፍ ኮንፈረንስ 2009 ዓ.ም የቀረበ፤ ፀውደ ጥናት መድብል ላይ የታተመ። ገጽ 93-136።

²⁴ All the quotes are in Sumner's 1985 *Classical Ethiopian Philosophy*.

²⁵ Mar Yisehaq (1982), “ለላውን ከመመርመር ተመልሰህ ራስህን ተመልከት፤ የምታውቅበትን እውቀት እንደሰጠህ እውቅ። ወደ እውነተኛው ሃይማኖት የሚያደርስህ መምህር አለህ፤ ሥነ ፍጥረት ነው።” (Besides examining others, examine yourself introspectively. You will realize that you are created to be intelligent, born with a priori knowledge. You have a guide to the true religion, which is creation.) (Own translation)

times to be “rejuvenated, becoming young once more” the human is advised to emancipate from darkness and corruption (Sumner, 1985, p. 23).

Human being in darkness and outdated thoughts, aged in sin due to the “corrupting world”, and “the shadows of deviation” from the true wisdom of God is required to learn from eagles. “Fly with the wing of thought unto the Most High, the sun of Justice, Christ, our Redeemer, where the man of old and all his [evil] ways will be dragged outside” (p. 23). Sin is due to the love of the corrupting world, and darkness is the dimming of the eye of the heart. Hence, the true and genuine existence of man can be achieved in his attendance in the schools of the learned men and his journey into the Almighty, perfection of goodness in moral character, the elimination of sin.

c. About the *hep^wopäs* (Explanation VIII):

*It is written in the Law: “Anyone who curses father or mother must die.”²⁶ There are people who are murderers of their father and of their own mother. [...] The young ones of the *hep^wopäs*, when their father grows old, pluck off his mounting feathers, peck his eyes, keep him in a hot place, welcome him under their wings, feed him, and guard him (Sumner, 1985, pp. 25-26).*

After the *hep^wopäs* example, *Fisalg^wos* rhetorically asks “How would not intelligent beings love their parents?” (Ibid. P. 26). The intelligent being, a human being, who forgets the good deeds of others and disregards one’s parents is lower than this little animal. This interesting passage entertains the centrality of family relationships and moral obligation towards aged parents. By extension, the passage can be interpreted to the societal duty towards the weak, acknowledging those who do good to the community and protecting the helpless aged members of the community.

d. About the *Serpent* (Explanation XI):

A serpent is not a good model to follow; it is not a respected animal. By fasting, the serpent takes off its old skin and becomes young; protecting itself by leaving its poison when drinking water; the snake attacks someone who is with clothes rather than one naked; and finally, when there is a threat for it, the serpent protects its head (Ibid. pp. 27-28).

Humans are invited to learn lessons from the four characteristics of the serpent. In the first case, man is advised to cast off his old bodily desires and pass through the narrower door of truth towards wisdom, the renewal of one’s personality. In the second case, man is advised to cast off his hatred (poison in the heart), when he is intending to nourish his life, to satisfy his thirst for wisdom and

²⁶ Leviticus 20:9 and Exodus 21:17, on the spiritual consequences of disregarding one’s parents. The morale of the image of *hep^wopäs* is in line with the other Biblical verses like Exodus 20:12 and Deuteronomy 5:16.

eliminate ignorance in its true source. As for the third characteristic, man is expected to rule out the unnecessary characteristics that expose him to be easily attacked by others. And finally, man is advised to protect his head, the dwelling place of all truth, after the metaphoric representation of God as the head of all things.

e. About the *qärtaryos* (Explanation XXIII):

Very quite and peaceful. From the testicles shoot out long hairs that are used as medicine. For that reason, when a hunter chases him, this animal cuts off some of these hairs and throws them to the hunter, surrendering them to him. Should another take up the chase, he hides lying on his back, until he sees that he is no more being followed and then he goes his own way (Sumner, 1985, p. 35).

The wise man is advised to cast away “all that is carnal concupiscence, luxury, greediness, pride and that slumbers in you, and leave it to your hunter, the devil, so that you may say: ‘Our soul has escaped like a bird from the fowler’s net’” (Sumner, 1985, p. 35). Accordingly, things of second order, which are not essential to our existence and the self should not be reasons for our captivity that deprive our essence and genuine human destiny. The hunters symbolizing many enslaving worldly affairs must be eliminated so as to achieve our invaluable human purpose in this life and the life to come.

2. *The Book of the Wise Philosophers*

This is a book that has many implications in Ethiopian philosophy. It is a good source on the place of foreign philosophy and its adaptation into the local context. This may serve us to understand the intercultural dialogues of Western philosophers and moral maxims of the people in addition to the religious statements from the Bible. Its comprehensiveness provides ample data for social, political, axiological, psychological topics and other humanities studies. The introduction of this book gives a good explanation about the value of philosophy. This partly contributes to challenging scholarly and public opinions that consider philosophy as a worthless and evil thing that deviates humans from religious faith and social values.

The overall content of the book is full of short quotations from different philosophers, from Biblical verses, and stories and sayings from the oral tradition of the society. The Amharic version is further enlarged by the translator integrating the sayings of Ethiopian emperors and an important section on the interpretation of dreams.

The central theme of this collection of sayings, a kind of anthology, is cultivating humans as a moral agent and guiding them as social potential in collective existence. While wisdom is acclaimed as the highest value, ignorance is considered the source of all evils. Many of the quotes are short aphorisms as guides for genuine existence and precepts while others are insightful explanations of epistemological, moral, metaphysical, political and social issues.

It is said: Above all, man seeks in wisdom conscience, and counseling, truth, patience, purity, chastity, praise, prayer. Wisdom is the foundation of faith which leads to the creator who deserves glory. [... The wise man] receives people with a happy face, respects his guests, pleases all, cares for his neighbor, avoids pride, reveres everyone, holds his tongue, speaks kind words. He is peacemaker, befriends all, keeps secrets, is silent about the faults of others, is free of high aspirations, remains quiet in an assembly (Sumner, 1985, p. 66).

The characteristics of being wise are unequivocally listed. While the general content of the paragraph on the necessity of wisdom and being wise is on the proper manner of acting in the personal and social life of individuals, it is not clear why the wise man should “avoid pride”, keep “silent about the faults of others” and “remains quite in an assembly”. But as it is the text to be studied by vast interpretation, these claims may intend to criticize the unnecessary talkativeness, irrational pride, and fault-finding psychology of the unwise. Hence, besides the seemingly mere advice, the passage stresses the epistemic worth of wisdom manifested in the good characters of individuals for social responsibility, and their manner of existence.

Being exalted from the assembly, the commoners, the wise transcend the restrictive and divisive social classes and receive all with love and respect, please all and revere everyone. Genuine humanity is achieved through the wisdom of the mind and love of heart, which is manifested in social harmony and pacification. One of the wise men said: “Man cannot be distinguished from an animal nor receive any special honour without his speech and his conscience. Had it been speechless and had he not perceived [reality,] he would have been like an animal” (p. 69).

They asked the monk: “O monk how are the people of this country?” he said: “if they remove the hopes of this century from their hearts and if they consider the rest of their life as bringing them nearer to the end, then they live in security and peace”²⁷ (Ibid. p. 70). Peace and security are taken to symbolize the common goods. In such a nation,

man is honored not when he is victorious, but when he is legitimate ruler that is a king. The duty of the victorious is to keep possessions in an orderly way. And the duty of the king is to keep

²⁷ ሰላም እና ፍቅር በልባቸው ያለ፤ የዘላለምን ሕይወት የሚያስቡ ሕዝቦች ያሏት አገር የተባረከች ናት። (A nation is blessed whose people are committed to love and peace, who strive to the eternal life).

everyone in an orderly way according to his dignity. When the victorious usurper is chosen [as ruler] things are made equal (Ibid. P. 144).

This passage must be read with another passage that goes like this, “It has been said: ‘A king is God’s representative in his country, and a notable is his representative in his religion and laws. [...] If the king and his noblemen are just, nobody will be unjust’” (Ibid. p. 148). Their political orientation on the role of the king as a rational being is assumed to be the representative of God on earth. In a community where there are just rulers, nobody can be unjust. And somewhere we read from a wise man that “Justice is a protector of the soul. A man’s conscience is not perfect unless he accomplishes what is best and most commendable” (Sumner, 1985, p. 72).

In a relatively longer passage on page 73, we read a poetic expression of the many organs of knowledge and wisdom.²⁸ A man of knowledge is required to qualify these organs of knowledge. How can a man become perfect? The wise man said: “by three things which are: reason, knowledge and faith, and these three are respectable characteristics, for reason is the ruler of his flesh, knowledge is its guide, and faith is its light” (P. 78). Human existence is the combination of reason (which is understanding), knowledge (conscience) and faith is the encounter to the hidden reality equated with light.

3. *The Life and Maxims of Skandās:*

The philosophical content of the life and maxims of *Skandās* is not in his biographical narrative and pseudo-experiment he used to ‘prove’ the statement from his respected teacher, ‘all women are prostitutes’ (Sumner, 1985, p. 168). This is to be criticized, not to be admired. The philosophical value of the text is his comments to the emperor *andryanos* and his explanations in response to several questions (on epistemological, metaphysical, anthropological and axiological aspects) presented to him. Selections are based on our theme. Let’s begin with his advise to the king,

Then pay attention to what I say and be careful; O king, you are a man just as I am. You depend upon all kinds of appetites just like irrational animals: some of these are good, others evil. [...]. But you O ‘andryanos, be careful and know, for you are more perfect by your mind and intelligence

²⁸ “One of the philosophers said: Knowledge has many organs. The most important one is humility. Its brain is understanding of how to act. Its tongue is a true word. Its conscience is thinking of good [deeds.] its hand is forgiveness. Its leg is the going to the learned. Its dominance is justice. Its kingdom is praise and gratitude. Its sword is hope. Its power is prayer. Its fence is love. Its camp is consultation with the conscientious people. Its wedding is victory, wisdom, patience, increase of truth. Its wealth is good exhortation. Its lodging is generosity and meekness. Its friend is love of generous people. Its treasure is to avoid offence.” Passages like this one are crucial readings on being human, existence and enlightenment in CEP that need detailed examination and interpretations.

than these [animals...]. You too have beasts in your houses, that pursue corruption from passion – a burning coal. For man is a little beast; many are his diseases. He has soul that rises to the sun, and a tongue that narrates works of art. But his mind cannot grasp them and soon he turns to tears by which he reveals sickness and chagrin. We have power over them that we may kill and remove from us diabolical thoughts (in Sumner, 1985, pp. 176-177).

Man is assumed to be higher than animals not only by virtue of his rationality but also by his commitment to control his unlimited appetites and his powerful will to kill and remove “diabolical thoughts.” The king is advised to cure his diseases, the beasts in him, the diabolical thoughts; the tongue is required to narrate the works of art, the soul to ascend to a higher condition of existence. I have selected some of his response questions relevant to our discussion.

- i. **Question 19: What is soul?** *“The soul is heavenly fire, an immortal creature like the angels, a lamp, [...] a good and rational fire, full of knowledge and intelligence; it speaks, stimulates and teaches reason to the body” (Sumner, 1985, p. 186).*
- ii. **Question 20: What is mind?** *“The mind is a hidden good; it is the light of the soul, a fire producing many thoughts; it accomplishes actions; it commands language; it is rational; it controls thoughts; it creates secret actions; it feeds and strengthens intelligence; it is the honor of the body, the adornment of wisdom, setting it up rightly.” (Sumner, 1985, p. 186).*
- iii. **Question 21: What is the spirit?** *The spirit is the wind that brings life to the body, a power that gives the voice; strengthens bodily limbs; it nourishes the bones; it is the life of everything that is moved [by its own force] (Sumner, 1985, p. 186).*

These three questions are targeted towards the invisible reality within human life. The soul, mind and spirit are crucial in human life. The very definition of being human is associated with these elements. This clearly shows the difference between the mind, spirit and the soul. While the mind is the narrower aspect of the soul’s activities, the soul is the guide of the body and repository of wisdom, spirit gives power to the body. The human as an amalgamation between these is presented in question 24.

iv. Question 24: What is man?

Man is endowed with mind; he is flesh, spiritual vessel, dependent upon all [his] senses; he is a place of dwelling for short time; he is weak and unstable; he houses the soul; he is concerned with time; he is happy for short span of time; he farms the earth; he is delight for the duration of life; he is an instrument made of bones; he sees this, abandons that; compelled by Necessity, he leaves this earth.” (p. 187)

These passages on the constituent elements of the human enlighten us on the philosophical characterization of man with the rational and immortal soul, but also with the body that lasts only short period of time in earthly existence. Man is considered as something who “houses the soul,” and soul intern is assumed to be the teacher of reason to the body.

v. **In Sec. III, Question 26:** *“They questioned the wise man and said to him: when we do wrong, we place wrong on the responsibility of the devil, though we do not perceive him.” He answered:*

“We are responsible both for our wrongdoing and for attributing this same wrong doing to the devil. Even when we are driven [to evil] by force, the desire is still ours. But the will is ours. If we do not will [the act] the devil has no power over us” (p. 203)

One of the basic questions in moral philosophy is discussed here, the problem of good and evil in line with free will and determinism. Man as a free agent of his actions with rationality of the mind and conscience is responsible for his actions.

The maxims acclaim the values of peacemaking, integrity, friendship and brotherhood. For example, integrity is considered as “praiseworthy” and “desirable action” that “announces joy” (Ibid. p. 187) ; “peacemaking” is considered as the “daughter of the Most High” that “drives away evil thoughts” (p. 192); integrity as a good desire shunning malice announces joy (p. 187); “friendship” is the soul’s an “incomprehensible acquisition” (p. 191). On the contrary, hatred is considered “a death which is not welcomed”; a calamity and commerce of absurdity, “an impurity and foolishness” which “perverts one’s mind”, and human decadency (p. 192). Man as a rational being, living in society with moral responsibility, is an agent and promoter of such desirable things like love, peace, integrity, and social harmony.

4. *Hatäta Zär’a Ya’əqob*

The treatise of Zär’a Ya’əqob is a famous original philosophy text in Africa, found to be the work of an individual thinker. His critiques of religious traditions and canons are not acceptable.²⁹ Apart from his social critiques, metaphysical, epistemological and axiological topics are contributions to African philosophy, and Sumner claims that he is the founder of modern philosophy in the 17th Century Ethiopia, parallel with the contemporaneous French philosopher René Descartes (Sumner, 1976). His metaphysical view is a creationist one grounded on faith in the personal God who created all things and who responds to our prayers.

Zär’a Ya’əqob the philosopher, as one from a Christian background and Orthodox Church’s education, praises and prays towards God. His characterization of the human as a rational being who is endowed with the rationality of the heart is responsible for investigating truth and examining views. Being human is according to him, being the subject of complexities of

²⁹ This needs a separate consideration.

responsibilities starting from the individual's own destiny to the climax of serving others and living in alignment with the will of God.

The mass killings of people by the king Susenyos and, the continuous clashes of the people due to differences in religious views struck his mind and forced him to contemplate on the nature of man, of God's patience, and the responsibility of man to reverse badness in the society. "Knowing the boundless badness of men, I dislike contact with them" (Sumner, 1985, p. 232). In his prayer in front of God, he begged God, who endowed man with reason, to make him "intelligent", and to reveal to him the hidden wisdom.

While man is rational, he is responsible for cultivating his intelligence (either from the help of God or through his own effort) to understand the hidden wisdom. "Man aspires to know truth and the hidden things of nature, but this endeavor is difficult and can only be attained with great labour and patience" (Ibid. p. 235). That great labor is the struggle in the intellectual regur and moral goodness. Zär'a Ya'eqob himself prays "O my Lord and my creator, who endowed me with reason, make me intelligent, reveal to me your hidden wisdom [; ... and] render me intelligence that I may know your precepts" (Ibid. p. 232).

On human nature, God, "did not create man to be evil, but to choose what he would like to be, so that he will be what he wills to be, good or bad"; and "God created man to be the master of his own actions" (p. 235). On the equality of men, he argues that "all men are equal" and all are "intelligent" (p. 239). Since the soul of man is immortal, there is life after death. After life there is a perfect divine justice "in which retribution will be made, and those who have fulfilled the will of the creator revealed through the light of reason and have observed the law of their nature will be rewarded" (Sumner, 1985, p. 241).

It is through such arguments for the afterlife and the immortality of the soul that Zär'a Ya'eqob and his student introduce us to the issue of moral responsibility. This moral responsibility comprises adhering to the laws of God and as a social reality and member of human nature, being responsible to love and care for our fellow people (p. 242). Zär'a Ya'eqob's contribution to the Ethiopian traditional collective faith is his emphasis on the importance of examining faith and enlightenment of individuals. On the indispensability of the natural light to reason he said the following:

God indeed has illuminated the heart of man with understanding by which he can see the good and evil, recognize the licit and the illicit, distinguish truth from error, 'and by your light we see the light, oh Lord!' If we use this light of our heart properly, it cannot deceive us; the purpose of this light which our creator gave us is to be saved by it, and not to be ruined [by it.] Everything that the light of our intelligence shows us comes from the source of truth, but what men say comes from the source of lies and our intelligence teaches that all that the creator establishes is right (1985, p. 237).

It is from this divine providence and human labor that we know the truth and live a life of worth living. Living the life of enlightenment and wisdom is a divine commandment and living according to the will of God. "The creator himself wills that we adorn our life with science [knowledge, wisdom] and work; for such an end did he give us reason and power." An important conclusion from his treatise is that "God does not create us perfect but creates us with such a reason to know that we are to strive for perfection as long as we live in this world" (Ibid. P. 242). This clues that the life of humans, in Zär'a Ya'eqob's thought, is a dynamic possibility of personal growth amenable to enlightenment and perfection through the help of God. That is why, in his philosophy, the idea of God is not different from the Christian personal God.

5. *Hatäta Wäldä Həywät*

For the most part, Wäldä Həywät's treatise is a restatement of the major metaphysical, moral, and epistemological philosophies of his teacher. The difference is his extension of philosophy into more practical affairs to respond to the social crises of his time. This practical dimension is the core value of his treatise on genuine human existence. The human is portrayed as a free and responsible agent of his own fate and a rational being to pursue wisdom and to transcend bodily desires. Man's moral and social responsibility emanates from the immortality of his soul and his knowledge of this truth.

The soul of man is immortal. Its reason is its existence; now the reason of our soul is a cloud of light which emanated from the existence of God the creator, and it is not extinguished but it returns to him [...]. Hence, eternal life is a necessity for our rational soul, otherwise the whole existence of man is empty, an apparition. [...] Then we ought to believe without hesitation that our life is immortal [...]. Our reason demonstrates to us that it is so; and this demonstration delights our spirit confirms us in an imperishable hope, makes of our whole life a thing of beauty; it is the basis of all good work and of all truth (Ibid. p. 257).

It is from these epistemic and ontological foundations that human social and moral responsibilities bear their footing, and genuine existence on earth is achieved to the extent that man's actions and behaviors cohere with the true nature of the human. Humans are exalted over all creatures in

intelligence and closer to the creator than other creatures due to the possession of a rational soul, “the fine nature that thinks and knows” (Ibid. p. 257).

Wäldä Həywät emphasizes the value of social harmony and despises hatred; the mutual reverence and cooperation among humans is based on the conviction that no one is independent and all are created equal. He claimed that “thus is the will of our creator manifested who placed men in this service that they may unite, love, help one another in obtaining all that each one of them needs for his life” (p. 261). By the light of reason, we know our creator and by the same light we shall know His will. From this knowledge, we are responsible for our deeds and choices. He elaborated the debate on human freedom and divine punishment in chapters IX and X of his treatise.

On the importance of cleansing our hearts and purification, Wäldä Həywät agrees with his teacher on the power of prayer. “Prayer brings together and unites our spirit with our creator and praises him; it teaches us that God creates all, is almighty, the source of all action and of all grace” (Sumner, p. 266). Wäldä Həywät precepts us to keep pure our heart and spirit and improve our actions. For such continuous renewal, education is ideal tool. The metaphor of the strive of the bee to gather precious nectar from various flowers and produce honey, which is sweet to the mouth and wax, which is light to the darkness. Similarly, “if you gather wisdom from all doctrines you can obtain two elements: the honey of good deeds which is sweet and uplifts your heart, [and] the wax of your doctrine which brings forth the light of your intelligence” (Ibid. P. 271). This metaphor is similar with the imagery of created things in *Fisalḡos*.

Wäldä Həywät’s emphasis on work and the importance of handicraft since he associated work and productivity with the natural essence of human beings. In deed genuine existence of human beings is productivity and sharing with others following after the likeness of our creator; while idleness and greed are considered as sins. Avarice is the sign of double poverty and drunkenness “destroys reason and that intelligence which distinguishes us from irrational animals” (Ibid. P. 272). In chapter XXIII, dedicated to discussing the ugliness of backbiting, adultery and theft, Wäldä Həywät uses a story of a man who went for the advice of a wise man. That man begs the wise man, “O wise man tell me what I should do in order to live in peace with all men?” (p. 275). The wise man put one of his hands on his mouth and the other on his genitals stressing that we should keep our hands away from theft, our genitals from adulteration and our mouth from heresy and

backbiting. His teachings on nurturing children, sexuality, and marriage are ideal for the establishment of the human family.

IV.

The Ethiopian Personalist World

“The Western world is one of things; the Ethiopian world is one of persons” (Sumner, 1978, p. 62).

What are the unique features of the Ethiopian personalist world? These five texts cannot fully represent the comprehensive corpus of Ethiopian philosophy; it is not exclusively limited to these texts. The study of Ethiopian philosophy or Ethiopian worldview requires deep commitment and patience. Sumner continued his study of Ethiopian philosophy in the Oral literature after he believed that he has completed the project in the written literature.

Philosophical exegesis of Geez manuscripts, the Arabic Manuscripts of Islamic Education, and the sources of Oral literature must be consulted to understand the overall philosophical world views of Ethiopians. Contributions to African philosophy like the works of Sumner have challenged the view that philosophy proper is what is in a written form and the result of individual’s critical reflection and developed “a new narrative, in which it is argued that philosophy is not exclusively textual, but also significantly and creatively oral, [...] and that the two forms are not mutually exclusive. African philosophical forms, therefore are importantly oral and written” (Kiros, 2015). According to Kelbessa, “Sumner stressed that the written works of Ethiopian philosophy and Oromo proverbs and folktales share the prevalence of the moral concern in content. This shows continuity from the written to the oral form in Ethiopian philosophy” (Kelbessa, 2022, p. 251).

While the human is considered as an asexual common denominator in all texts except in the Life and Maxims of *Skändas*, the human is responsible being subject to moral obligations, projected to the highest form of existence in acquiring wisdom. In the religious orientation, most of the symbolic representations of the human are attributed to the way of life nearer to God which may be proven by his loyalty to the religious laws and undeserved love and care he has for fellow men. In the individualistic rational articulations of Zär’a Ya’eqob and Wäldä Həywät, though the help of God is not denied, man is a free and responsible agent of his deeds. As a rational and thinking being endowed with the contemplative mind and loving heart, he is projected to the destiny of the immortality of his soul so long as he lives the life of examination.

From careful examination of the oral and written sources, we can arrive at a conclusion that the Ethiopian view of reality is one of harmony and integrity that entertains five aspects.

First, in the social phenomena, there is harmony between the individual and the community. The individual is required to fit into the harmonious social phenomena, the social potential of the individual to enrich the social harmony. This is a variant of the African conception of Ubuntu, “I am because we are”, as opposed to the Western Cartesian individualistic subjective turn, “I think therefore I am”, the instrumental rationality, evolved into existentialists’ conception of freedom and liberal orientation of our contemporary era.

Second, in the metaphysical realm, the material is a dwelling place of the spiritual, pertaining to the view of the spirited matter and of the significant role of the spiritual reality in practical life. The personal orientation of considering creation as a permanent indwelling of the spiritual realm is common in the Ethiopian worldview.³⁰

Third, from the viewpoint of the institutional and epistemological strata, there is thinking that the secular should characteristically be harmonious with the sacred. The holidays, the rituals, the practices in the religious and cultural rites and the whole phenomenon of public gatherings to administer justice, in productivity and other practices, the spiritual is invited to sanctify the secular. The cultural rituals and the storytelling where animals and plants are the main characters, the conception of nature as a dwelling place of ancestral spirit in many Ethiopians, prove the strong attachment between the secular and the sacred in the human and the nonhuman reality.

Fourth, there is strong harmony between the human and non-human phenomena. Accordingly, humans are stewards in the universe who intentionally intervene in nature to assist its course. The view is that the Ethiopians did not see nature from an outside point of view. There is rather a strong link with the natural phenomena and man as an agent of history shapes the course of nature’s movements by responding to its voices. Hence, a natural phenomenon is either to be assisted, valued intrinsically or imitated; and through language and naming, Ethiopians evoke the social potential of individuals and groups and their place as active agents in the course of nature.

³⁰“Any villager, even though they are doing shifting cultivation, cannot come to the territory without proper consultation with the village. It is not just a forest, it is demarcated, they know historically who it belongs to. So land is not only economical, it is historical, political, spiritual and very emotional” (The Oakland Institute P. 42.).

The Greek looks at the world to contemplate in it the supreme theoria; the Semite listens to the world in order to answer to it. The Greek is a thinking subject, the Semite is a responsible subject; the Greek reflects, the Semite responds (Sumner, 1978, p. 11).

For example, in the Ethiopian hagiography, the “Saint-Creation relationship, [...is] unbiased and there was a selfless mutual reverence. The ascetic wilderness became a place of transformation and sanctity for the ascetic. It has been an *undisturbed sanctuary for life to freely regenerate and multiply*” (Gobena, 2023, p. 167, emphasis mine). There is a similar relationship between creation and humanity in many indigenous societies of Ethiopia (Kelbessa, 2010; The Oakland Institute, 2011).

Finally, there is a strong believe on the harmony between the natural and supernatural; the vision of the two worlds with inseparable link. Different religious faiths assert that the supernatural God is in direct contact³¹ with the natural world given human beings righteousness and wisdom to receive God’s Grace and protection. These are the culmination of the personalist and theocentric Ethiopian worldview.

These views constitute the holistic picture of the Ethiopian personalist world, the view that the personification of reality is beyond the instrumental rationality of the West. Both the written texts and oral narratives reveal these fivefold amalgamations. The individual is responsible to the society, the secular is to be shaped by the religious – sacred – spiritual, and finally at the cosmic level, humans as part of the universe which is guided by the benevolent God are required to stick in the observance of the spiritual guidance, namely the will of God. Hence, all the texts prepare man for the higher condition of existence, liberating the human and emancipating him from bodily weakness and mental ignorance, preparing for a genuine afterlife.

Grounded in this holistic and harmonious picture of reality, the human person is the combination of soul, flesh, and spirit. Unlike the Cartesian, Western dualistic ontology of the human, the Ethiopian conception of humanity is a comprehensive characterization of the equilibrium between the flesh, the mind, and the soul–spirit. As a creature amidst the creatures³², he is in continuous

³¹ For example, the concept of Tewahedo, a believe that entertains the simultaneous transcendence and immanence of God. This is explicit in the central thesis of St. Yared’s famous statement “ሥርዓተ ሰማይ ተሰርዖ በምድር” (“The heavenly ideal has prevailed on Earth” or “the Earth is governed by the Divine law”) which pinpoints this harmony between the natural and the supernatural and by extension between the sacred and the secular, the material and spiritual, the mind and the soul.

³² “God has formed two levels of created things: first the 'noetic', 'spiritual' or 'intellectual' level, and secondly, the material or bodily. On the first level God formed the angels, who have no material body. On the second level he

encounter to respond and act according to the demands of nature; and as a social being and moral agent, he is the subject of ethical and political responsibility; and as a partaker in the heavenly realm, the human is responsible for spiritual growth and purification.

Not surprisingly, as a citizen of the other world by virtue of his immortal soul, this earthly life is a preparation for the perfection of his soul through liberation from uncontrolled bodily desires, and the cultivation of mental elevation by transcending the confines of ignorance. Hence, two important things are stressed on being human with an immortal soul: emancipation from sin that comes from unlimited bodily lust and liberation from ignorance, whose source is laziness to examine truth.

So what is the place of Ethiopian philosophy in such an adventure of humanity for emancipation? Donald Lavine (2006) in his book *Powers of the Mind*, discusses the idea of “Great Tradition” and a “Little Tradition”. Among the examples of the Great Tradition, he included the “Ethiopian Orthodox Christian texts and an esoteric type of poetry [namely qine as high level of creativity]” (Levine, 2006, p. 12). The important aspect of these Great Traditions is their preparation of the human to a higher condition of existence.

Notable in all these traditions is a shift from using cultural forms solely for purposes of adjustment to natural and social worlds to ways of honoring them as guides to transcending worldly habits and thereby producing a higher, “civilized” type of humanity (Levine, 2006, p. 12).

Another important contribution of Ethiopian philosophy to the philosophical enterprise is the emphasis on the rationality of the *Heart (Libuna)* (Kidane, 2012; Cohen, 2014; Kiros 2005; Kiros, 2024), the rather overlooked aspect except few examples (Kelbessa, 2022) in Western philosophy which attributes rationality to the mind. “For Zara Yacob, rationality is the intellectual activity of the heart. The heart is the seat of reason rather than the seat of feeling. Our creator has put our reason in our heart” (Kelbessa, 2022, p. 246)³³. Sumner concluded that at the “end of a long and

formed the physical universe - the galaxies, stars and planets, with the various types of mineral, vegetable and animal life. Man, and man alone, exists on both levels at once” (Ware, 2018, p. 50). This is central in the Ethiopian World view. According to Eguale, the human is situated in the intermediate position of the heavenly and the earthly realms. “ሰው በሁለት ዓለማት መካከል የሚገኝ አማካኝ ፍጥረት ነው። በአካሉ የጉልህ ዓለም ተካፋይ ነው። በመንፈሱ የረ[ቂ]ቁ የዘላቂው ዓለም ተሳታፊ ነው። በሥነ ፍጥረት ላይ የሚጸናው የግዴታ ሕግ በአሱም ላይ ይጸናል። በመንፈሳዊ ነገሮች ላይ የሚጸናው የነጻነት ሕግ በሱም ላይ ይጸናል” (አጓለ፣ 2003፣ ገጽ. ፲፪)። “Man is an intermediate being between two worlds. By his/her body, s/he takes part in the corporeal world; by his/her soul/mind, s/he takes part in the world of spirits. Natural law that determines the workings of creatures also determines human beings; and the freedom given to spiritual beings is also endowed to mankind” (Eguale, 2003, p. 12; own translation).

³³ *Libuna, lebawe* (understanding), *Hige Libuna* (conscience). Parallel to the Ethiopian Orthodox teaching on the highest form of human condition is the cleansing of the heart or purification, *Nitseha Libuna* (Mar Yisehaq), the

thorough investigation of the totality of Ethiopian written and oral expression of wisdom and philosophy in the strict sense, one is left with an all-round view of the world and human experience” (Sumner as quoted in Kelbessa, 2022, p. 252).

These internal and external syntheses brought a special philosophical tradition in Ethiopia, its intercultural and contextual hermeneutics. It is not confined to the local customs and intellectual traditions; it also accommodates foreign thought and wisdom with a special form of hermeneutics. According to Messay, Ethiopian philosophy entertains the continuity and change, indigenous – local and global elements, invention and creative borrowings. “External borrowings have so great a share in the formation of Ethiopian identity that isolationism, however cherished, never became systematic. Syncretism as much as preservation defines Ethiopia”. This is asserted by many who “have remarked how artistic and literary borrowings are done in such a way that they always bear a distinctly Ethiopian mark” (Messay, 1999, p. xix). It is this comprehensive philosophical terrain in Ethiopia that deserves enthusiastic presentation to the contemporary audience.

What are the practical implications of such a personalist world? This needs separate consideration. But to say few words, we can deduce practical lessons to social justice, social harmony, reconciliation, peace, cosmic integrity and to redress contemporary ethical dilemmas emanated from social phenomena and technological advancement like AI and synthetic biology.

How the human being is required to successfully adventure into the Most High is succinctly preserved in the intellectual treasures of the Ethiopians. Both in a written and oral form, with the evolution unfolding philosophical tradition, Ethiopian philosophy attracted the attentions of scholars like Sumner and his contemporaneous African philosophers like Oruka, that again opens another methodology in philosophy where the Oral is now becoming a written. Hence, philosophy demands a continuous redefinition and special approach based on the spirits of the times and local contexts as its fundamental questions allow such redefinition in method and content.

thoughts of CEP emphasize on the development of human wisdom, the clarity of understanding and the development of moral conscience.

V.

Conclusion: Sumner's Path and the Way Forward in the Studies of Ethiopian Philosophy

I have come to the conclusion that it is via the unreserved commitment and intellectual honesty of Professor Claude Sumner that the collections of texts see the light of publication and address the academic circles. Thanks to him, we are in a better position to transcend the methodological constraints and shortage of resource materials to Ethiopian studies and philosophical studies in Ethiopia. He just put a glamour that attracts our eyes and awakens our attention towards the philosophical examination of the huge written and oral wisdom we bequeathed from the intellectual traditions of Ethiopia.

This discussion tries to entertain the questions of being human, existence and enlightenment as portrayed in the texts of CEP. It is attempted to situate the place of humanity in the Ethiopian worldview, which Sumner argues is a personalist one, and the role of being human as a moral agent and promoter of history and himself anticipating the spiritual realm. Being human, therefore, is understood in its ontological combination of the soul–spirit (an immortal and heavenly fire, the thought rationality to the body), mind (the guide to the body, the light) and the perishable flesh (full of lust and insatiable desires) and existential conditions of social potential, and purification, continuous transformation in wisdom.

The human is responsible for ensuring the immortality of his soul and as a social being among other human beings who share the same aversions and desires, he is responsible for beautifying the collective existence and social harmony, and cosmic integrity. Humans, through the light of reason (conscience) and as a moral agent, distinguish the bad from the good, and by virtue of our freedom, we choose our destiny.

We have realized that the philosophical tradition in Ethiopia and in Africa entertains a special wisdom, a special form of sapiential rationality against the Western instrumental reason, and the vision of the world which is not popular in the West. This rich philosophical tradition can contribute to the production of knowledge and practical responses to the most pressing problems

Contemporary scholars from the philosophy departments of Ethiopian universities are required to investigate the philosophical treasures of Ethiopian society. We should work on the critical examinations of the translated texts and the analysis presented by Sumner and others. We are also required to systematically examine the oral literature so as to come up with the organized documents of popular thinking and folk wisdom that may play tantamount roles and serve as intellectual weapons in handling the most pressing local and global problems and advance human wisdom. This invites us to question the very sense of philosophy itself. So, having access to the richness of the Ethiopian wisdom philosophy, its features and manifestations, are we able to redefine philosophy, or at least to question the Western requirements for philosophy?

References

A. English Sources

- Assefa, E. (2024). Zär'a Ya'eqob and Wäldä Həywät: Exceptionality and Situatedness of the Ḥatātas in the Ethiopian Intellectual Tradition. In L. Cantor, J. Egid & F. Merawi (Ed.), *In Search of Zär'a Ya'eqob: On the History, Philosophy, and Authorship of the Ḥatāta Zär'a Ya'eqob and the Ḥatāta Wäldä Həywät* (pp. 121-138). Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110725810-007>
- Cohen, L. (2014). Dawit Worku, Kidane: The Ethics of Zär'a Ya'eqob. *Orientalistische Literaturzeitung*, 109(6), 503-505. <https://doi.org/10.1515/olzg-2014-0165>
- Gobena, A. (2023). Sanctity and Environment in Ethiopian Hagiography: The Case of Gedle Gebre Menfes Qiddus (Vol. 4). BoD-Books on Demand.
- Kebede, M. (1999): *Survival and Modernization Ethiopia's Enigmatic Present: A Philosophical Discourse*. Asmara: The Red Sea Press.
- Kelbessa, W. (2010). *Indigenous and modern environmental ethics: A study of the indigenous Oromo environmental ethic and modern issues of environment and development*. Council for Research in Values and Philosophy.
- Kelbessa, W. (2022). "The Life and Work of Professor Claude Sumner." In *Philosophical Responses to Global Challenges with African Examples*, 35. The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy. Pp. 243-260.
- Kidane, D. W. (2012): *The Ethics of Zär'a Ya'eqob. A reply to the historical and religious violence in the seventeenth century Ethiopia*. Rome: Pontificia università gregoriana.

- Kiros, T. (2015) Introduction to Classical Ethiopian Philosophy. accessed at <http://www.fusionmagazine.org/introduction-to-classical-ethiopian-philosophy/>
- Kiros, T. (1996). Claude Sumner's classical Ethiopian philosophy. *Northeast African Studies*, 3(2), 39-52.
- Kiros, T. (2005). *Zär'a Ya'eqob: Rationality of the human heart*. New Jersey: Red Sea Press.
- Kiros, T. (2024). *Zär'a Ya'eqob's Inauguration of Modernity and Cardiocentrism*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, Inc.
- Kiros, T. (February 9, 2015). Introduction to Classical Ethiopian Philosophy <http://www.fusionmagazine.org/introduction-to-classical-ethiopian-philosophy/>
- Levine, D. (2006) *Powers of the Mind: The Reinvention of Liberal Learning in America*. The University of Chicago Press.
- Levine, D. N. (1972). *Wax & Gold: Tradition and Innovation in Ethiopian Culture*. The University of Chicago Press.
- Levine, D. N. (1974): *Greater Ethiopia: The Evolution of a Multiethnic Society*. The University of Chicago Press.
- Rahmato, D. (2009). *The Peasant and the State: Studies in Agrarian Change in Ethiopia 1950s-2000s*. Addis Ababa University Press.
- Russell, B. (1945). *A History of Western Philosophy*. Simon & Schuster, Inc.
- Serequeberhan, T. (1994). *The Hermeneutics of African Philosophy*. New York: Routledge. University of Birmingham.
- Sumner, C. (1976). *Ethiopian Philosophy Vol. II: The treatise of Zär'a Ya'eqob and of Wäldä Həywät Text and Authorship*. Addis Ababa: Commercial Printing Press.
- Sumner, C. (1978). *Ethiopian Philosophy Vol. III The Treatise of Zär'a Ya'eqob and of Wäldä Həywät: An Analysis*. Addis Ababa: Commercial Printing Press.
- Sumner, C. (1981). *Ethiopian Philosophy Vol IV. The Life and Maxims of Skəndəs*. Addis Ababa: Commercial Printing Press.
- Sumner, C. (1985). *Classical Ethiopian Philosophy*, Commercial Printing Press, Addis Ababa.
- Sumner, C. (1986). *The Source of African Philosophy: The Ethiopian Philosophy of Man*. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag Wiesbaden GMBH.

Sumner, C. (1998). “Ethiopia: Land of Diverse Expressions of Philosophy, Birthplace of Modern Thought” in Sumner, C. (1998) Proceedings of the Seminar on African Philosophy, December 1-3, 1976, 2nd edn. Addis Ababa University. Pp. 327-333.

The Oakland Institute. (2011). Understanding Land Investment Deals in Africa: Country Report Ethiopia.

Ware, K. (2018). *The orthodox way*. St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press.

Amharic Sources

ሞገስ አቁበ ጊዮርጊስ። (1953)። አንጋረ ፈላስፋ (የፈላስፎች አነጋገር) አዲስ አበባ (?)።

ተስፋ ገብረሥላሴ (አዘጋጅ)። (1982)። መጻሕፍተ መነኮሳት አንደኛ መጽሐፍ (ማር ይስሐቅ)። አዲስ አበባ፡ ተስፋ ገብረ ሥላሴ ማተሚያ ቤት።

ተክለ ጻድቅ መከራይ። (2ኛ እትም ፳፻)። የኢትዮጵያ ታሪክ፡ ከአጼ ቴዎድሮስ እስከ ቀዳማዊ ኃይለ ሥላሴ፡ አዲስ አበባ።
አበራ ጀምበሬ። (2006)። ኢትዮጵያ ሕግና ፍትሕ አፈጻጸም ታሪክ (ከ1426 እስከ 1966 ዓ.ም)። አዲስ አበባ፡- ሻማ ቡክስ።
እጻለ ገብረ ዮሐንስ። (2003)። የከፍተኛ ትምህርት ዘይቤ 2ኛ እትም፡ አርቲስቲክ ማተሚያ ድርጅት፡ አዲስ አበባ።
ያሬድ ፈንታ። (2007)። ሐተታ ዘርዓ ያዕቆብ ወሐተታ ወልደ ሕይወት፡ የኢትዮጵያ ፍልስፍና። አዲስ አበባ፡ ፋር ኢስት ትሬዲንግ ኃላ.የተ.የግ. ማኅበር።

ዳንኤል ወርቁ። (2007)። ሐተታ ዘርዓ ያዕቆብና ሐተታ ወልደ ሕይወት። 4ኛ እትም አዲስ አበባ።

ገነት አየለ አንበሴ። (ተርጓሚ) (2009 E.C)። አርኖ-ሚሺል ዳባዲ፡ በኢትዮጵያ ከፍተኛ ተራሮች ቆይታዬ።

ጌታቸው ኃይሌ። (2006)። ሐተታ ዘርዓ ያዕቆብ በሚባል ስም የሚታወቀው የወርቁ የሕይወት ታሪክ። ሚኒሶታ፡ ኮሌጅሺል።

Public Sphere, the Virtual Subject and Ethics of Social Media

Fasil Merawi³⁴

Abstract

Analysis of the public sphere is currently used as a foundation for the creation of a public discourse, democratic governance and the institution of a public space dictated by the power of the better argument. Classically, the analysis of the public sphere was seen as part and parcel of the project of enlightenment and is founded on the German philosopher Jürgen Habermas' work, The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeoisie Society. Here, the activities of individuals in forming a public space where all individuals have an equal voice regardless of their societal status and backgrounds were emphasized. Analysis of social media as a public sphere ranges from its impact on classical conceptions of the self, and its role in societal engagements and activism to how it contributes to the process of democratization. One theme emphasized here is the virtual subject as the individual found in the world of social media, sharply contrasted to the real subject involved in the concrete world of contradictions and human interactions. Drawing on current studies into social media and the virtual subject, in this paper, I will argue that the analysis of social media in today's world must closely pay attention to moral dilemmas in such a public sphere made possible by social media. One must as such explore the impact of social media on the cultivation of moral excellence and upholding of basic human relationships involving trust, friendship and confidentiality.

Key Words: Public Sphere, Social Media, The Virtual Subject

Public Sphere, the Virtual Subject and Ethics of Social Media

1. Introduction

The project of modernity is seen as the exercise of rationality, facilitating human emancipation against the background of custom, conventional authority and religion. In such a conception, there is a distinction between the private and public spheres. The former refers to the life of the individual and the isolated subject, whereas the latter pertains to the emergence of a public space where, through discursive rationality, issues are debated and contested among individuals. As Pauline Johnson argues, "Whereas private forms of association endeavor to cement

³⁴ Assistant Professor, Department of Philosophy, Addis Ababa University

their exclusive character, an interest in building the shared grounds in terms of which the needs and points of view of strangers can become mutually intelligible is central to the goals of a public” (Johnson,2006,2). Such a vision finds its clearest expression in the works of the German philosopher Jürgen Habermas.

As Habermas argues, the project of societal enlightenment in modern Europe was founded on a public sphere of everyday arguments. Such a horizon was seen as the emergence of a public reason ruled by the offering of better arguments horizontally envisioned among the members of a community. In speaking of the public character of rationality, Habermas remarks, “We call events and occasions 'public' when they are open to all, in contrast to closed or exclusive affairs-as when we speak of public places or public houses” (Habermas,1991,1). Habermas soon augmented such a vision with an ideal of communicative reason founded in everyday speech acts and validity claims. In both his analysis of the public sphere and communicative action, Habermas saw instrumental rationality as a major threat to human emancipation.

In today’s world, the analysis of the public sphere is founded on the emergence of social media, rapid achievements in science and technology, and the emergence of a new form of subjectivity in the virtual subject. There is a controversy regarding the nature of social media and its role in social life. Some see it as an agent of democratization and social activism, whereas others perceive social media as an extension of Western thinking’s focus on individual liberty and freedom. As such, “the discussion of the public sphere has been colored by the key concerns of activists, scholars, and politicians in particular countries” (Mustapha, 2012, 36). Again, others perceive social media as presenting a new space where classical notions of individual nature, moral conduct, and human interactions are radically altered, whereas for others, social media promotes radical ideologies of extremism and fundamentalism, propagating views that are polarized.

In this paper, I will argue that there is a need to incorporate an analysis of moral dilemmas in today’s studies of social media by appealing to virtue ethics and the focus on the cultivation of moral excellence in the world of social media. As such, going beyond a narrow focus on the role of social media in development, modernization, and the transfer of knowledge and information, the impact of social media on everyday human interactions and classical conceptions of friendship, trust, and reciprocal relationships must be explored further. The paper starts by introducing the notion of a public sphere. The essence, genesis, and transformation of the public sphere will be

explored here. This is followed by an analysis of social media and the public sphere, where current attempts to situate the public sphere in the age of the internet, social media, and the virtual subjects are discussed. Finally, in the third section, I will highlight some of the ethical challenges to social media in presenting the impact of social media on human nature and the self, friendship, trust and confidentiality.

2. The Idea of a Public Sphere

The genesis of the public sphere cannot be separated from the attempt to institute relations of symmetry and also embody principles of accountability and transparency in the system of administration. One must operate within a distinction between the public sphere as an ideological justification of bourgeoisie relations and as a stage where discursive rationality regulates the quest for truth. This is a quest for, “identifying the strategies necessary within a late capitalist society to preserve, under the present conditions, the principle of the public sphere, but not its bourgeois form” (Hohendahl and Russian, 1974, 47). Looking at the influence of instrumental rationality and money, and power in the public sphere, for the true realization of a public sphere, there must be a clear separation between communicative and instrumental rationality.

Conceptions of the public sphere for Ku focus on a distinction between the sphere of private life on one hand and that of public opinion on the other. In such a distinction, a public sphere “has to do with the issue of publicness, openness, and visibility as opposed to privacy, secrecy, and invisibility” (Ku, 1998, 172). It represents a platform for contesting different claims to truth driven by the spirit of argumentation. The public sphere is also separated from the domain of politics since it is not a form of political participation or engagement but a world of individual opinions and arguments.

Habermas’ notion of the public sphere is founded on the idea of individual autonomy, the power of argument and the absence of external factors that impose limitations on the public exercise of reason. Particularly, Habermas “investigates the beginnings of a kind of public discourse that claimed to represent general public opinion in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Europe” (Ward, 1997, 367). Habermas strictly believed that ascribed status was not important in the public sphere; horizontal relations existed among individuals in such a space and “these public forums

were, in principle, inclusive” (Ward, 1997, 368). Primarily, it was ideas and not social status that mattered most in such a sphere.

Habermas analyzes the trajectory of democratic institutions and communicative rationality in the West. Being carried out through an interdisciplinary analysis, such a study particularly focuses on modern forms of the media and the immense potential they hold in inculcating the principles of communicative rationality. In such an analysis, “the press and media are central” (Benson, 2009, 177). Whereas most thinkers are interested in the idea of a public reason as a utopian ideal, Habermas’s attempt to find an empirical ground for the exercise of public reason in modern Europe is mostly met with skepticism. What is left unanswered in most investigations of the public sphere are questions like, is the public sphere founded in real history or is it simply a mere hypothesis? Benson remarks, “We need answers to such questions as: What is the empirical structural organization of the public sphere? How do public spheres vary cross-nationally?”(Benson, 2009, 180)

The promise of a public exercise of rationality and a quest for truth carried out through the force of the better argument for Habermas was thwarted by the capitalistic economy and the influence of instrumental rationality and the interests of the powerful and elites on the public exercise of rationality. Critics of Habermas argue that what is concealed in the name of enlightenment and public reason is ideological manipulation and class conflict. As such, “recourse to the Enlightenment thus hides the present class conflict and tries to reconstruct what is long lost” (Hohendahl and Silberman, 1979, 92). Particularly being forwarded from the postmodern critiques, there is a charge that the idea of a public sphere is founded on the grand narrative of knowledge and emancipation which is abandoned in the postmodern world. From this angle the idea of a public exercise of rationality is no longer tenable in today’s world of difference, particularity and the abandonment of emancipation in favor of a contextual analysis.

Within the continental tradition, there are different ways of understanding the essence of the public sphere. Critical modernists like Habermas celebrate the public sphere as a stage for communicative rationality, whereas postmodernists like Foucault witness the rise of a repressive and “the perfection of disciplinary power during the same historical period”(Johnson and R. Villa, 1994, 428). Although communication and understanding are situated by Habermas and others as the goal

of the public sphere, still, this must be situated more as a normative ideal rather than a factual characterization of everyday potentials embedded in modern societies.

Although presented as a sphere freed from any particular interest, the public sphere was in reality influenced by the ideas of individual liberty and universal rationality. As Ryder sees it, “ the rhetorical conventions of the dominant public sphere privilege ideologies of individualism, autonomy, efficiency, abstract reason, and naive multicultural pluralism, ideologies that privilege whiteness ” (Ryder,2007,516). Because of this, the idea of a public space dictated by the force of the better argument is being criticized in both normative and factual grounds. The problems in language, like linguistic confusion, and also legitimating crises resulting from non-linguistic factors like the role of money and power, are not properly explained in conventional studies of the public sphere.

3. Social Media as a New Form of Public Sphere

Currently, there is an attempt to characterize the internet and social media as a new form of public sphere. This is predicated on the assumption that it's not technical knowledge but individual opinion and not institutions but virtual subjects that are important in such a world. As such, “the Internet might again serve as a space where non-specialists and the general public can interpret a vast array of cultural artefacts for themselves because of its potential for reproducing and distributing virtual versions of them”(Ward,1997,372). This also entails the emergence of the new world of social media that made new human relations and interconnections across boundaries.

In today's world, the classical opposition between the private life of the individual and the community populated by other rational actors is mediated by social media. Particularly, “with the development of the internet, this polarization between public and private media started to change” (Miller et al, 2016, 2) . Social media completely revolutionized conventional forms of communication. It created a space where horizontal relations were instituted among individuals as opposed to forms of media like the television, whose access was regulated by institutional actors on one hand, and other mediums like the telephone, which primarily facilitated conversations between two individuals. One sees that social media is heavily contrasted with “public broadcast media such as television, radio, and newspapers [and] media that facilitated private communication

between two people as one-to-one conversations, for example, a telephone conversation” (Ibid). One sees forms of media that are more interactive and dictated by the intentions of users here.

The idea of social media is associated with the emergence of multiple spaces online, participatory practice, and a sense of a self that is constituted in one’s relations with others. For Kessler, “the term 'social media' refers to the use of 'web-based and mobile technologies to turn communication into an interactive dialogue” (Kessler, 2013, 26). It is perceived as a forum regulated by multiple actors rather than institutions and bodies that are formal in their nature. One also sees that social media is more highly dictated by individual users than corporations, and that going beyond space and time, it has made possible new forms of communication among subjects. As such, “social media is not just a communication tool; it is also a connection tool” (Kessler, 2013, 27). Paradoxically, it is the autonomy given to individual users on social media that also leads to the dissemination of false content and fake news online.

For Uncel, there are three peculiar features that characterize our usage of social media. First of all, users have a greater degree of autonomy over the features of their profiles. Secondly, it is the users that direct their networks on such media and also their interactions with other users. Thirdly, “users are creating unique identities and then establishing and sharing connections with other users” (Uncel, 2011, 46-47). Social media creates a space for individuals to fashion their identities, thereby giving them access to shape the way their personality is perceived. Based on this, one could see social media as a realm where personality identity is formed in a more dynamic manner without necessarily being confined to factual assertions and objectivity. Based on this, “social network spaces are not simply representational spaces: they are performance spaces” (Mazali, 2011, 290). It represents a space where all voices are equal and public opinion is regulated through the contestation of individual opinions and beliefs.

Such an ethical reflection into the world of social media allows us to understand what kind of selves we are becoming in such a virtual realm of human interactions. From the perspective of virtue ethics, it is the cultivation of moral excellence as seen in virtues like honesty, courage, humility, empathy whereas from an existentialist perspective, it is the upholding of individual freedom under the performance spaces that are made possible by social media that is of a greater importance. Furthermore, the Habermasian approach allows us to understand the possibility of a discourse that is being carried out by the force of the better argument in the realm of social media whereas the Foucauldian approach on the contrary concentrates on the tools of disciplining and control that are being presented by social media.

The ethical challenges posed by the usage of the internet are directly related to the rise of new forms of science and technology in the world of globalization. One sees here that the “ongoing globalization of trade gives rise to ethical questions both nationally and internationally, for individuals and for collectives” (Tiemtore and Vettraino-Soulard, 2004, 2). Particularly in the developing world, programs of modernization and development are directly related to the mastery of science and technology since it is believed that the dissemination of knowledge through the new mediums raises the level of literacy and the transfer of knowledge in one’s society.

One indispensable element of any process of democratization in today’s states is the existence of a transparent and accountable media that promotes the public good. This shows that the media functions as the “the bearers of democracy's political communication beyond face-to-face settings” (Dahlgren, 2012, 99) Whereas the classical analysis of the public sphere focuses on public spaces, the printing press and dialogical encounters among equal partners, these days the public sphere is associated with the internet and social media that function as spaces for a discursive search for the truth. This shows that, “there are today many more, albeit smaller, public spheres that can be accessed, and there are more media outlets online that are eager for more opinion content” (Dahlgren, 2012, 101). Critics might argue that social media does not have a truth-functioning utility although such line of criticism arises from the failure to pay attention to the world of everyday speech acts and the contestation of truth that is taking place in such a realm of human interactions. Some of the dynamic possibilities presented by social media include serving as gateways for individuals into the world of public opinion and also participating in “what constitutes politics, what is deemed to be political” (Ibid, 102). Social media challenges traditional relations among individuals by providing a stage where one interacts with a multitude of other actors. As such, there is a need to integrate the study of moral dilemmas presented by social media alongside the presentation of social media as a new form of public sphere. Some of these dilemmas include truth seeking vs. algorithmic rationality, freedom of speech vs. hate speech, privacy vs. public participation, authenticity vs. performance, and inclusion vs. algorithmic bias.

Still, questions are raised like does the internet needs to be regulated, or should it be a space simply dictated by the voices and inputs of diverse actors? And also, does the internet promote processes of democratization, or is it involved in disseminating the values of one culture to other parts of the world, realizing ideological manipulation in the process? Tiemtore and Vettraino-Soulard argue

that several moral dilemmas are actually involved in today's usage of social media. These involve a conflict between individual and communal interest, social space and space in social media as well as personal expression and societal harm. Hence, "the digital revolution gives rise to several conflicts: Conflict between the real and virtual worlds, and the associated danger that we may neglect or ghettoize the real world; Conflict between law and a legal vacuum" (Tiemtore and Vettraino-Soulard, 2004, 8). Furthermore, whereas some regarded the internet and social media as a catalyst for societal progress, others conceived it as being part and parcel of the ideology of neoliberalism, the rights to non-interference and an advocacy of individual liberty

4. Ethical Challenges of Social Media

Social media certainly acted as a positive force in the dissemination of information, facilitation of interaction among individuals and acceleration of "the speed and scale of group coordination" (Gladwell and Shirky, 2011, 154). The dynamics of social relations are revolutionized by social media, where the virtual world is becoming more important than real day-to-day interactions. There is also an assumption that the level of literacy and value given to individual autonomy dictate one's usage of the social media. Because of this, "Political freedom has to be accompanied by a civil society literate enough and densely connected enough to discuss the issues presented to the public" (Shirky, 2011, 34). Against the argument that social media facilitates processes of democratization, there is an objection that social media as a forum is not well enough to realize organized struggle and societal coordination in a given society. It is also asserted that social media incites violence and serves as a medium for preaching radical ideologies.

The internet and social media offer dynamic possibilities regarding the construction of the self by allowing individuals to control their self-representations and also decide who they interact with. As such, "it enables users to be masters of their identities" (Parsell, 2008, 41). Social media provides easy access to individuals without the need for a sophisticated knowledge of technological appliances. Such access also allows individuals to further causes that are extreme and only focused on advancing a certain interest. Here, "the likely result is radical opinion polarization" (Parsell, 2008, 45).

The same social media that served as a forum for social activism also dissolves the boundaries between the individual and public, through the mediation of interactive frameworks. Added to this

is the fact that companies who own such technologies of social media employ certain mechanisms to control and influence the activities of their users. As Tierney remarks “the owners of these publics track each correspondence and purchase in order to better understand, analyze, and market their communities' consumptive practices” (Tierney, 2013, 83). Although individuals increasingly utilize social media as instruments of resisting oppression, fighting regimes, and raising public opinion on certain issues, governments also employ the latest technologies to regulate the usage of such medium.

In characterizing the public sphere both in terms of a social space and also social media, there is significant attention given to the incursion of instrumental rationality into the world of everyday communication. It's asserted that, “once controlled by capitalist interests, the media actively contributed to the decline of the public sphere” (Claassen, 2011, 70). Based on this, the idea that social media must be regulated by the forces of the market rather than a normative reference is being criticized. It's argued that social media must be subjected to moral principles and the public good in general. It's also assumed that social media must be “conducive to the well-functioning of the democratic process” (Claassen, 2011, 66). This has rapid implications for the content of social media and its impact on the lives of individuals.

One feature of social media is the fact that users share personal information online without seriously considering the issue of privacy. In such social media, “there is no way to verify the identity of a user who creates a profile” (Uncel, 2011, 55). This is a serious issue since information from social media is even being presented in courts as evidence. There is the proliferation of so many fake profiles and such profiles being used to commit crimes and spread hate and radical and fundamentalist beliefs. Social media for Charles Ess is an integral element of the modern constitution of the self. Being modeled after the Enlightenment tradition, it radiates the virtues of control over one's own destiny, and the ability of the self to posit new modalities of existence and to map out a space for one's life in the world of others. Hence, “the technologies of literacy and print thus facilitate the emergence of a sense of self that is foundational to the justification of modern liberal democracies” (Ess, 2010, 107). In the world of social media, questions like What is the interaction between the material and online self are being posed. Furthermore, the notion of identity becomes disputable when the reference to the actual self-embedded in the world of everyday objects is no longer needed in the realm of social media.

In the age of social media we need to revisit our moral categories and ideals. One area here is trust and care which functions as an agent of societal cohesion and reciprocal relations amongst the members of a community. One as such needs to ask, what is trust in the virtual world and can one think of morally binding relationships in the world of social media? One as such need to explore “the prospects for developing trust between partners transacting through the Internet” (De Laat, 2005, 167). One needs to ponder what leads individuals to reveal confidential information on social media, and why do individuals readily participate in the world of others, although they have no real contact with them whatsoever. Again, is there any underlying logic that dictates human interactions in the world of social media? One needs to ask, “Are they just acting irrationally and foolishly, or is there some reason behind these behaviors nonetheless?”(De Laat, 2005, 172).

One could use the moral philosophy of virtue of ethics in order to assess the role of social media in the life of the individual. One can ask is moral virtue developed in our interaction with others in the space of social media. Furthermore, do the social media foster the values of friendship, care and compassion which could be regarded as crucial habits that must be developed in our interaction with others? One could ponder, “what, then, are the character traits strongly associated with those friendships marked by excellence?” (Vallor, 2010, 164) Are we more moral in the virtual or the real world? Which one is more conducive to the cultivation of virtues?

New modalities of existence, altering given forms, are introduced by social media. Both in the concrete and virtual worlds, identity is created and destroyed. One as such needs to study the essence of the self in the virtual world compared to the real self that is found in the world of objects. Do we have even an ontological status in the virtual world? We need to investigate “what are the criteria by means of which disparate episodes of postings, comments, video links, etc. that together constitute an online person in a social networking website” (Hongladarom, 2011, 539). In both the real and virtual worlds, there is a process of socialization where we are inducted into the world of others. Identifying what unifies the two worlds and expressions of the self, concrete and virtual, is still a difficult task.

A virtual self is said to be founded on the material world, having its distinct features. But if a self is only found in the virtual but not in the real world, then what are the implications to the problem of personal identity? This is relevant since in today’s world of social media, “most social network sites now allow the relatives of deceased users to choose to keep their profiles online as a memorial,

allowing other users to post tributes and messages, sometimes speaking of the dead in third person, sometimes in second person” (Stokes, 2012, 366). One needs to probe, do the virtual self-found in the space of social media disappear when the real subject dies? And if the virtual self exists even after the death of the real self, is it a member of the moral world and subject to moral evaluations? Does this refute the claim that personal identity is only grounded in the objective world? In the world of social media, identity persists in a digital form as the existence of the human subject is not limited to the idea of an individual occupying space and time in the physical world. The digital self needs to be subjected to moral evaluations because the actions of such a mode of subjectivity have real consequences in the real world. Also, the idea of a personal identity that is only founded on the physical world is narrow since it does not account for the complex relations that are being established among individuals in the digital world.

Determining the essence of moral boundaries in a virtual space is a difficult task. For some, social media is a space where one envisions a goal of ontological authenticity. Just like in the real world, the subject tries to transcend his facts of life, and conventional authority, also in the virtual world we try to posit a new self, one that is freed from conventions and is dynamic in its nature. One needs to explore, “what are the technologies that society places at his or her disposal for achieving that end?”(Bakardjieva and Gaden, 2012, 404) Social media is a space where one reshapes his nature, acknowledges the existence of others, and enters into their world. This calls for a normative ideal that regulates our interactions with other individuals.

Reconciling Identity Formation and Truth Dissemination in the Digital Public Sphere could be made possible by seeing identity construction as foundational—not antithetical—to public engagement. In a functioning democracy, individuals must first recognize themselves as subjects capable of judgment and expression before they can meaningfully participate in collective truth-seeking. Social media, by allowing individuals to explore, perform, and assert identities, actually foster the conditions for democratic engagement: it enables voice, visibility, and recognition.

The ethical implications of social media use are urgent and complex. They touch on fundamental concerns such as privacy, personal security, and the health of public discourse. Privacy, in particular, has emerged as one of the most pressing challenges of the digital age. Frequent data breaches and the misuse of personal data highlight the vulnerabilities users face when engaging on these platforms (Trepte, 2021). Privacy is ethically tied to autonomy, consent, and dignity—core

values in any democratic society. Users must be vigilant to protect their privacy: they should carefully manage their privacy settings, limit the personal information they share, and utilize tools like encryption and Virtual Private Network VPNs. At the same time, social media platforms bear a greater responsibility. They must be transparent about their data collection practices, implement robust data protection protocols, and prioritize user consent by establishing clear, user-friendly policies.

Beyond privacy, misinformation and fake news pose serious ethical threats. The ease with which false information spreads on social media, especially without editorial oversight, can have damaging effects on public health, democratic processes, and societal trust. As the comment notes, misinformation about issues such as the vaccination for the novel coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) is not merely an error of communication; it is an ethical failure that endangers lives (Cinelli et al., 2020). Social media platforms must recognize their role as modern gatekeepers of public knowledge. They should implement fact-checking systems, label or remove demonstrably false content, and redesign their algorithms to reduce the amplification of sensationalist misinformation. This is not a restriction on freedom of speech, it is an ethical obligation to uphold epistemic integrity in public discourse.

Another serious concern is online harassment and discrimination, which disproportionately impact marginalized communities. Hate speech, targeted attacks, and exclusionary behaviors degrade the quality of public engagement and create hostile environments. Just like the physical world, the virtual space must uphold principles of equality, respect, and human dignity. Social media platforms must take clear, enforceable steps to prevent discrimination (Blackwell and Tianying, 2018). This includes establishing robust content moderation policies, investing in AI and human review systems, and ensuring swift responses to abuse reports. They must also educate users about respectful engagement and the consequences of violating community standards. By doing so, social media platforms can contribute to a safer, more inclusive digital public sphere.

5. Conclusion

In modern societies, one witnesses a quest for grounding critical praxis and human emancipation in a space within which all members of a given community have an equal voice. In modern Europe, such an urge was expressed in the notion of a public sphere as a context that institutes symmetrical

relationships and functions as an autonomous unit being shielded from the influence of particular interests, power, and ideology. Today, such an idea of a public sphere is expressed in social media that revolutionizes our conceptions of space, time, subjectivity and human interactions by creating a new stage in the space of social media. Such a space is dictated by concrete human relations, although it also has its own internal logic, making possible new ways of relating to other individuals.

The analysis of social media is mostly associated with the politics of new forms of media and how they could serve as agents in processes of democratization. As such, the role of science and technology in general and social media in particular in the dissemination of information and transfer of knowledge is emphasized. What is taken for granted in such an emphasis is how social media revolutionizes our conceptions of moral autonomy, everyday human relationships, cultivation of moral excellence, and moral responsibility. This shows that the public sphere and our usage of social media must be regulated by a normative ideal to mediate the radical disparity that currently exists between access to new forms of technology and moral responsibility as rational subjects.

For the proper ethical regulation of social media platforms, there are a number of steps that need to be taken. First of all, there needs to be a multilateral ethical oversight body, and it needs to be founded on the insights of philosophers, technologists, civil society representatives, and the users of social media. Secondly, there is a need to carry out ethical impact assessments, mainly concentrating on issues like changes that are taking place in algorithms and the policies that are being passed down in the domain of the moderation of online content. Thirdly, there is a need to introduce digital virtual education across the curricula, and this needs to be seen as a way of realizing the common good in the world of knowledge production. Fourthly, there is also a need to introduce a transparent form of governance. There is a need to realize the participation of the government, platforms of social media, the academic world, civil society representatives, and social media users in the management of social media platforms.

References

- Benson, Rodney. 2009. "Shaping the Public Sphere: Habermas and Beyond", *The American Sociologist*, Vol. 40, No. 3, pp. 175-197, Springer
- Blackwell, Lindsay, Tianying Chen, Sarita Schoenebeck, and Cliff Lampe. 2018. "When Online Harassment Is Perceived as Justified." In *Proceedings of the International AAAI Conference on Web and Social Media*, Vol. 12, No. 1, Association for the Advancement of Artificial Intelligence.
- Cinelli, Matteo, Walter Quattrociocchi, Alessandro Galeazzi, Carlo Michele Valensise, Emanuele Brugnoli, Anja L. Schmidt, Fabiana Zola, Corrado Matteo Del Vicario, and Alessandro Scala. 2020. "The COVID-19 Social Media Infodemic." *Scientific Reports*, Vol. 10, No. 1, Article 16598, Nature Publishing Group.**
- Claassen, Rutger. 2011. "Communication as Commodity: Should the Media be on the Market?" *Journal of Applied Philosophy*, Vol. 28, No. 1, pp. 65–79, Wiley.
- Dahlgren, Peter. 2012. "Public Intellectuals, Online Media, and Public Spheres: Current Realignments." *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society*, Vol. 25, No. 4, pp. 95–110, Springer.
- Ess, Charles. 2010. "The Embodied Self in a Digital Age, Possibilities, Risks, and Prospects for a Pluralistic (democratic/liberal) Future?" *Plenary 3, New Dynamics in Online Social Networking: Revisiting Communication, Consumption and Division of Labor*.
- Gladwell, Malcolm, and Shirky, Clay. 2011. "From Innovation to Revolution: Do Social Media Make Protests Possible?" *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 90, No. 2, pp. 153–154, Council on Foreign Relations.
- Habermas, Jürgen. 1991. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. Trans. Thomas Burger, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts.
- Hohendahl, Peter Uwe, and Russian, Patricia. "Jürgen Habermas: 'The Public Sphere' (1964)." *New German Critique*, No. 3, pp. 45–48, Duke University Press.

- Hohendahl, Peter Uwe, and Silberman, Marc. 1979. "Critical Theory, Public Sphere and Culture: Jürgen Habermas and His Critics." *New German Critique*, No. 16, pp. 89–118, Duke University Press.
- Hongladarom, Soraj. 2011. "Personal Identity and the Self in the Online and Offline World." *Minds and Machines*, Vol. 21, pp. 533–548, Springer.
- Johnson, James, and Villa, Dana R. 1994. "Public Sphere, Postmodernism and Polemic." *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 88, No. 2, pp. 427–433, American Political Science Association.
- Johnson, Pauline. 2006. *Habermas: Rescuing the Public Sphere*. Routledge, Madison Ave, New York.
- Kessler, Edward. 2013. "Social Media and the Movement of Ideas." *European Judaism: A Journal for the New Europe*, Vol. 46, No. 1, pp. 26–35.
- Ku, Agnes S. 1998. "Boundary Politics in the Public Sphere: Openness, Secrecy, and Leak." *Sociological Theory*, Vol. 16, No. 2, pp. 172–192.
- Laat, Paul B. de. 2005. "Trusting Virtual Trust." *Ethics and Information Technology*, Vol. 7, pp. 167–180, Springer.
- Mazali, Tatiana. 2011. "Social Media as a New Public Sphere." *Leonardo*, Vol. 44, No. 3, pp. 290–291, The MIT Press.
- Miller, Daniel, Costa, Elisabetta, Haynes, Nell, McDonald, Tom, Nicolescu, Razvan, Sinanan, Jolynna, Spyer, Juliano, Venkatraman, Shriram, and Wang, Xinyuan. 2016. "What Is Social Media?" In *How the World Changed Social Media*, pp. 1–8. London: UCL Press.
- Mustapha, Abdul Raufu. 2012. "The Public Sphere in 21st Century Africa: Broadening the Horizons of Democratization." *Africa Development*, Vol. 37, No. 1, Special Issue on 'The African Public Sphere: Concepts, Histories, Voices and Processes', pp. 27–41, CODESRIA.
- Parsell, Mitch. 2008. "Pernicious Virtual Communities: Identity, Polarization and the Web 2.0." *Ethics and Information Technology*, Vol. 10, pp. 41–56, Springer.

- Ryder, Phyllis Mentzell. 2007. "Multicultural Public Spheres and the Rhetorics of Democracy." *JAC*, Vol. 27, No. 3/4, pp. 505–538.
- Shirky, Clay. 2011. "The Political Power of Social Media: Technology, the Public Sphere, and Political Change." *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 90, No. 1, pp. 28–41.
- Stokes, Patrick. 2012. "Ghosts in the Machine: Do the Dead Live on in Facebook?" *Philosophy & Technology*, Vol. 25, pp. 363–379.
- Tiemtore, Oumarou, and Vettraino-Soulard, Marie-Claude. 2004. *Ethics and the Internet in West Africa: Toward an Ethical Model of Integration*. Africa World Press, Inc., Trenton, NJ.
- Tierney, Therese F. 2013. "Disentangling Public Space: Social Media and Internet Activism." *Thresholds*, No. 41, Revolution!, pp. 82–89, Massachusetts Institute of Technology.
- Trepte, Sabine. 2021. "The Social Media Privacy Model: Privacy and Communication in the Light of Social Media Affordances." *Communication Theory*, Vol. 31, No. 4, pp. 549–570, Oxford University Press.
- Uncel, Megan. 2011. "Facebook is Now Friends with the Court: Current Federal Rules and Social Media Evidence." *Jurimetrics*, Vol. 52, No. 1, pp. 43–69, American Bar Association.
- Vallor, Shannon. 2010. "Social Networking Technology and the Virtues." *Ethics and Information Technology*, Vol. 12, pp. 157–170.
- Ward, Irene. 1997. "How Democratic Can We Get? The Internet, the Public Sphere, and Public Discourse." *JAC*, Vol. 17, No. 3, pp. 365–379.

**The Politics of Social Media and Peace Building in Ethiopia: Understanding the Nexus
Nebiyou Ermias³⁵**

Abstract: *In Ethiopia, especially since the 2005 national election, social media has emerged as one of the prominent tools in shaping and altering the political sphere, particularly in the realm of peace building. While it can serve as a catalyst for violence and escalate political unrest, it also has the potential to foster non-violence change, democratization, and peace initiatives. However, despite the fact that social media plays its own part in influencing and transforming the political sphere, there remains a debate regarding whether it operates as an autonomous entity or merely as a tool. This perspective, in turn, affects our approach to social media. To thoroughly discuss social media in the context of politics, however, much of the existing literature tends to focus on its instrumental perspective. In this paper, I contend that it is overly simplistic to view social media through either of these two philosophical lenses; rather it should be understood in terms of its specific characteristics, types, contexts, and its mediating function. Denying this and approaching social media in isolation would lead us to the doctrine of determinism - the belief that the nature of technological artifacts dictates their impact on society and vice-versa. Indeed, we cannot avert the inherent qualities of social media. But, various factors shape the relationship between social media and peace building. Consequently, to effectively regulate the role of social media and uphold peace within the country, I insist that we must navigate social media comprehensively in terms of its specific mediating role within the Ethiopian context. To achieve this, I will utilize a multi-method philosophical approach to investigate the various issues addressed in the paper.*

Keywords: Ethiopia, peace-building, politics, social media, technological determinism

1. Introduction

In the course of our life, whether realized or not, we humans are constantly entangled with technology of one form or another. Every aspect of our life is intertwined with it, and perhaps, it is considered to be one of the major driving forces of human history. To put in Friedrich Rapp's words, "to be human is to have a technology" (1981:10). Particularly, when it comes to the twenty-first century, it has become even harder to imagine human life without technology (Kaplum, 2004).

In today's Electronic Age,³⁶ we have acquaintance with technological artifacts in almost every texture of our lives. With the advent of the internet and social media, one of the prominent internet and computer-based technology, in particular, technology has become a daily tool for an ever-

³⁵ Nebiyou Ermias is a PhD candidate of philosophy and can be contacted at nebiyou2013@yahoo.com

³⁶ The Electronic Age is a period in human history characterized by electronics and internet technologies.

increasing number of people across the world. The impact of social media is readily evident since it has become preferred means for various activities (Auvinen, 2011).

Internet technology in general and social media in particular, has several functions and people use it for a number of purposes. The majority of internet users indeed use the internet in order to access information (including news); to keep in touch with friends and family; to express themselves (sharing personal information); to entertain themselves and so forth. Moreover, it is also facilitating new forms of political engagement (Surjit and Manpreet, 2013; Keith, 2016; John, 2017). As Deutsch (1959) posits, with the advancement of technology, people have started to engage in the sphere of politics than ever before. He goes to say that the development of technology does not only increase “the number of participants in the political game”, but also “in some basic regards have changed the nature of politics itself” (1959:669). This is particularly true for internet technology and social media, which have been playing a significant role in influencing political systems across the world, albeit with varying degrees.

The central elements of the internet such as social media and social web communities deserve the lion’s share of the credit for shaping political systems in the world for better or worse. There is a reason to substantiate the growing role of social media in driving and changing how politics is played (Onyedikachi et al., 2017). Over the past decade, the world has witnessed the role of social media in episodes of major political transformations. In line with this, Auvinen eloquently summarizes the role of social media in world politics and presents some of the events as follows,

What do demonstrations on city streets in the Philippines in 2001, the election of Barack Obama as President of the United States in 2008, revocation of the results of the fraudulent elections in Moldavia in 2009, the M-15 movement with their camps and demonstrations in Spain in 2011, the so-called ‘Arab Spring’ in the Middle East in early 2011, and the ‘Occupy Wall Street’ movement that started in New York, also in 2011, all have in common? They have all used social media to help organise such protests and mobilise their responsible agents (2011:4).

All the above cases clearly demonstrate that social media have played a major role in driving major political events in the world. Furthermore, those popular social media platforms such as Facebook and X/Twitter are believed to have the potential for increasing political engagement (Surjit and Manpreet, 2013). Social media is used to inform, mobilize, and increase awareness among people regarding issues like human rights, justice, democracy, etc. (John, 2017). Consequently, it helped

activists to mobilize thousands of people and sparked widespread protests in the streets of different countries (Arafa and Armstrong, 2016).

In general, the internet and social media, apart from being alternative sources of information, have enabled people to directly engage in the political sphere. The realm of social media is thus becoming an emerging political field *per se*. As aforementioned, though technologically-driven life encompasses and cuts across various issue-domains, what I want to emphasize in this paper is the very nexus between social media and politics. My aim is to specifically cast light on the politics of social media in Ethiopia vis-à-vis peace building.

As part of the world community, the emergence of social media in Ethiopia also changes many aspects of politics in the country (Abreham and Tibebe, 2019). Online political activities increased than even before. People started to raise politically oriented issues; set different agendas; form online groups and so forth, as a counter to narrowing of offline outlets (Abreham and Tibebe, 2019; Adamu, 2020). The government also generates different laws and takes ample measures regarding social media. This implies that social media are becoming an alternative political forum. Thus, in this paper, I will uncover the politics of social media and how they mediate the politics of the country in general and the process of peace building in particular. As peace building is pivotal to ensure the wellbeing of citizens and to maintain sustainable development, it is a matter of necessity for every nation. Cognizant of the positive role that peace building plays, the incumbent government of Ethiopia has paid close attention to realization. However, there are various factors that affect the process of peace building and the role of internet technology and social media is among the factors that enter into the equation (Adam and Holguín, 2003). In this paper, I will therefore examine the relationship between social media and peace building in the country, especially after the 2005 national election, using multi-method philosophical approach. Specifically, I will employ a critical approach and a speculative method to analyze and critique existing arguments concerning social media, while also proposing my own perspective and speculating on its implications and consequences. Additionally, I will integrate phenomenological and empirical methods to ground my argument in observable phenomena, complemented by a thorough examination of various texts. Furthermore, an interdisciplinary approach will be applied to draw insights from other disciplines, enriching the analysis and broadening its scope.

Accordingly, I will basically utilize secondary data and indirect phenomenological observations including textual data (i.e., philosophical writings, social media policies, reports, academic literatures from multiple disciplines), as well as media and digital artifacts (i.e., posts, public discourse in digital spaces). This data will be collected through reading, monitoring trending content, and analyzing specific selected events. Since direct interviews or surveys are not being conducted, empirical grounding will be achieved through the analysis of these data, interpreted through philosophical lenses and interdisciplinary synthesis. Hence, this approach does have its limitations. The lack of primary data limits the study's capacity to capture the firsthand experience of social media users. Thus, this paper employs a thorough phenomenological analysis of the available secondary sources.

To this end, in the second section of the paper, I will examine the instrumental and determinism view on technology and their implications. The third section will present the two facets and the politics of social media in Ethiopia. In this section, I will explore both negative and positive features of social media and the government's regulatory measures. The fourth section will accentuate the intricate relation between social media and peace building. Finally, I will provide the conclusion and implications of the study.

2. Is Social Media Autonomous or a Tool? Exploring the Dilemma

As of April 2025, there are 5.31 billion social media users around the world. This number is equating to 64.70 (75% of the eligible) percent of the global population.³⁷ This figure clearly indicates how overwhelmingly social media is intermingled with everyday life of society. As a matter of fact, different people use different social media platforms for different purposes, such as communication, entertainment, online marketing, job portals, religious stages, academic platforms, social discussion forums, political activism, and so forth. For instance, the latest data with regard to this reveals that the majority of social media users visit social media for the purpose of keeping in touch with friends and family; filling spare time; reading new stories; finding content (e.g. Articles, videos); seeing what's being talked about; finding inspirational for things to do and buy; finding products to purchase; making contacts; and so forth.³⁸ However, even though social

³⁷ Here, however, it is important to note that this figure may not represent the exact (unique individual) number of social media users since there are duplicate accounts (<https://datareportal.com/social-media-users>).

³⁸ <https://datareportal.com/social-media-users>

media seem ubiquitous and we make acquaintance with different platforms of social media one way or another, we do not have a precise understanding about its nature. This is what Andrew Feenberg called “the paradox of the obvious” (2010:6). It is due to, most importantly, the complex nature and attributes of social media. People attribute different features to technology in general and social media in particular. Among others, when some of them considered it as a mere tool ready to serve the purpose of users, others labeled social media as an autonomous entity. So the crucial question about it becomes, what is social media?

According to the Oxford Dictionary, social media refer to websites and applications for social networking.³⁹ This collective term can also be defined as an internet-based technological product that facilitates the creation and sharing of ideas, thoughts, interests, and other forms of expression through the building of virtual communities and networks (whatis.com, 2020). It has numerous interactive digital platforms, including Facebook, YouTube, X/Twitter, WhatsApp, Instagram, Wechat, TikTok, and so forth, by which it enables users to connect and share information among each other. As aforementioned, though it originated as a way to interact with friends and family, gradually, it has become preferred means for various activities. According to research, social media profoundly affect different aspects of human life, i.e., shifting the ways certain activities are used to be done (see also Surjit and Manpreet, 2013; Keith, 2016; Maisam, 2019). However, the impact of social media on society has led people to conceive social media, at least, in two different senses, namely, instrumentalism and determinism.

I) Determinism

Technological determinism is a theory that asserts “technology constitutes a new cultural system that restructures the entire social world as an object of control” (Feenberg, 2002:7). According to determinists, there are some forms of inner values in modern technology that affect the social sphere and the environment. In fact, there is a variety of technological determinism, spanning “from positive description of an inevitable or autonomous technological order based on certain laws to claims that technology is the dominant factor in social change” (Bimber, 1990:2). Accordingly, it comes in ‘harder’ and ‘softer’ variants. The distinction between hard and soft

³⁹ <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/social-media#:~:text=%20F%C%B%8C%C9%99%CA%8A%CA%83I%20%CB%88mi%CB%90di%C9%99%2F%2F%C%B%8C%C9%99%CA%8A%CA%83I%20%CB%88mi%CB%90di%C9%99%2F,such%20as%20Facebook%20and%20Twitter>

determinism is decided in terms of technology's effects and its causes. Soft technological determinism argues that technology is one important force amongst others, while hard technological determinism contends that technology is the main or the only significant driver (Adler, 2006). In line with this, one of the proponents of this doctrine, Martin Heidegger, pointed out that technology is "neither only a human activity nor a mere means within such activity" (Heidegger, 1977:21). Rather, it is self-autonomous. Hence, for technological determinism, technology can never be value neutral since it "forms a culture of universal control" (Feenberg, 1999:3).

II) Instrumentalism

Instrumentalism is a theory that illustrates and analyzes technology as a tool or a means to an end. By the same token, instrumentalists claim that technology has nothing to do with inherent values. Rather what makes good or bad is the way in which users use technology. This theory depicts technology as something "indifferent to the variety of ends it can be employed to achieve. In the book *The Meaning of It All* (1998) Feynman states that "whether the result is a good thing or a bad thing depends on how it is used" (1998:3). He illustrates this by taking an example from a Buddhist temple as follows,

In the temple a man said, "I am going to tell you something that you will never forget." And then he said, "To every man is given the key to the gates of heaven. The same key opens the gates of hell" (Feynman, 1998:3).

According to this view, value consideration is located in the intent of using the technology rather than in the technology itself. This metaphor vividly catches the nature of social media too. Values are located in the intent of the user of social media rather than in the social media itself. Hence, social media is deemed to be value-neutral, because it does not have any inherent ethical, political, or cultural values of its own; it is simply a tool. As Andrew Feenberg (2002) explains,

A hammer is a hammer, a steam turbine is a steam turbine, and such tools are useful in any social context. In this respect, technology appears to be quite different from traditional legal or religious institutions, which cannot be readily transferred to new social contexts because they are so intertwined with other aspects of the societies in which they originate (2002:6).

As clearly elaborated in the quotation, though technological artifacts profoundly affect different aspects of humanity, they do not have control over human activities. According to instrumentalists,

therefore, technological artifacts do not have the power to control and define the overall formation of social values and norms, since they are tools that are used for different activities.

So, what does it imply?

As discussed, instrumentalism and determinism analyze technology broadly and social media particularly in two different yet opposing manners. Both perspectives emphasize the intricate relationship between technology and humanity, and as well as how technological advancement results in social, political economic, and environmental transformations. Nevertheless, the extent to which they attribute significance to technological artifacts distinguishes the two dominant theories of technology. In this particular paper, I do contend that while both theories aim to identify various characteristics of technological artifacts, it is misleading to fully categorize technology under either theory, as they do not represent the essential or overarching aspect of technology. Instead, it is convenient to understand and approach technology in terms of its specificities, including its specific relationship with users, its type and the context in which it exists. That is due to the fact that different technological devices possess unique features and impacts in the environment from which they emerge and in the recipient environment. When the society that develops technology effectively manages its relationship with it, others may fail to do so. While some technological artifacts are designed to fulfill the needs of their users and perform their respective mediating roles, others can alter human behavior and actions in the world due to their intrinsic design and nature.

Specifically, in relation to social media and politics, the development of social media has played a critical role in changing the political aspects of society in the world (Surjit and Manpreet, 2013; Onyedikachi et al., 2017; Keith, 2016; John, 2017). It mediates different political activities as an alternative to offline activities. As I shall discuss in the next section of the paper, social media brings both positive and negative consequences for the political aspects of our world. Although social media platforms are tools used for various purposes and are shaped by their users, they also exhibit deterministic elements.

The very design of social media platforms and their algorithms influence and sometimes determine how users behave and act. For instance, social media is by its very nature, “decentralized and participatory” (Comninou, 2013:11). It has also manifestations of the egalitarian and participatory nature of politics. The major one is social media ensure freedom of expression (Keith, 2016). It

enables people to engage in the sphere of politics through their own initiatives. Then people have access to express their own opinions, interests and concerns, and especially the poor, marginalized and excluded ones have an opportunity to express themselves and to make their voice heard through social media platforms (Onyedikachi et al., 2017). The other nature of social media is that they allow ownership of information; one can produce self-published information. People use the internet and social media not only to access or gather information but also to generate and publish their own opinion and personal experience. Users also employ social media platforms for interactive exchange of different political feelings and opinions, ideologies, news, agendas, and experiences (Keith, 2016). These functions of social media encourage and facilitate direct participation in the political sphere (Surjit and Manpreet, 2013; John, 2017). Social media also serve to promote mutual understanding and to organize online associations (Onyedikachi et al., 2017). It enables rapid formation of networks and demonstrates our common goal across other (gender, culture, race, etc.) differences. It connects people, their ideas and values, like never before (Keith, 2016). As the very name suggested, social network sites involve power which relies on a network or interaction among the participants. It consists of online communication, interaction and organization. Interpersonal relationships are created and maintained through different social media platforms. Thus, this mutual understanding creates a window of opportunity to undertake collective political actions such as political demonstrations and campaigns. However, political engagements on social media also arise from algorithmic influence. For instance, viral trends and the so called “echo chamber” do not primarily result from user intent; instead, they emerge as a consequence of machine learning systems that prioritize engagement metrics. These systems often reinforce existing biases and inequalities by learning from biased data (misinformation, hate speech and rumors), ultimately contributing to injustice and unrest.

In a nutshell, as instrumentalists claim that social media serves as tool to fulfill users’ goals. But, they tend to overlook the embedded biases present in its algorithms. This is significant because, the algorithm not only situates but also determines how users behave and act (i.e., (re)shaping their engagement within the political arena). Accordingly, these features of social media underscore the importance of critical engagement with technology, given its varied features and impacts. For instance, technology exhibits different features and impacts in the environment from which it originates and the context in which it is received. When the society that develops technology properly manages its relationship with it, others fail to do so. While some of technological artifacts

are designed to fulfill the needs of their users and perform their respective mediating roles, others alter human behavior and actions in the world due to their intrinsic design and nature. Therefore, I argue that we must understand technology in its specificity, considering its nature and its relationship with the local context. In support of the argument, the following section will explore the nature of social media within the Ethiopian political context.

3. The Two Facets and The Politics of Social Media in Ethiopia: An Overview

In Ethiopia, with the advancement of telecommunications and information communication technology, access to the internet and social media has significantly grown. Accordingly, the number of internet users has been increasing than ever before. To put it in perspective, for instance, at the beginning of 2005, internet penetration in Ethiopia was below 0.25 percent (the Human Rights Watch report, 2014). In 2014, 1.9 percent (1,889,850 people) of Ethiopians were connected to the internet (Internet World Stats, 2014). But, according to the digital report on Ethiopia (2025), the internet penetration rate became 21.3 percent in the country (equivalent to 28.6 million of the population) in January 2025.⁴⁰ Amongst this segment of internet users, most of them are concentrated in the urban areas (the Human Right Watch report, 2016). Many of them access the internet through mobile cell phones, government and private organizations, work places, academic institutions, internet cafes networks and so on (Digital report, 2022).

Though the existing rate of internet users in the country is relatively marginal and limited to a small number of populations, many people have started to integrate the internet and social media, in particular, in their daily lives. There are 6.35 million (5.3% of the total population)⁴¹ active social media users in Ethiopia at the start of 2022. This was an increase from 1.56 million in 2014 (2.2 million (2015), 3.8 million (2016), 3.8 million (2018), and 6.2 million (2020)).⁴² As of January 2025, Ethiopia was home to 8.30 million (3.2% of the total population) social media user identities.⁴³

Internet users in Ethiopia use the internet and social media in different ways for different purposes. Among others, internet users employ social media for political purposes (Megenta, 2010; Abreham

⁴⁰ <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2025-ethiopia>

⁴¹ Note: the number of social media users may not represent unique individuals.

⁴² <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1307184/number-of-social-media-users-ethiopia/>

⁴³ <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2025-ethiopia>

and Tibebe, 2019; Adamu, 2020). Both the public as well as the government use social media in order to engage in politics actively. One of the most important functions of social media is giving common people (those who have similar agendas) the means to express their dissent. The government and the people (to some extent) alike exploit this opportunity. For instance, the government of the country has recently begun to actively participate in the entire of social media in different manner in order to spread information to its supporters; communicate directly with the public; and to enhance the culture of political participation (Adamu, 2020). Thus, social media serve the people as a forum for political discourses and political actions (Abreham and Tibebe, 2019).

3.1. The Positive Aspects of Social Media and its Manifestations

In the digital history of the country, Ethiopians began to engage extensively in discussing political and other issues in the early 1990s, when an Ethiopian email distribution network called EDDN was formed (Megenta, 2010). Later in 1997, websites such as Cyberethiopia.com and Ethioline.com were established to connect Ethiopians (see also; Megenta, 2010). These websites inspired individuals to create more personal pages. One of the most influential political websites in this regard was “Dagmawi”.

In recent years, with the introduction of different social media platforms, a number of political websites and political pages have come into being. Among others, the political blogospheres have played a significant role in articulating their views about Ethiopian politics. Put more, individuals have used social media platforms such as Facebook to form and organize political groups (virtual community) and politically motivated campaigns (Abreham and Tibebe, 2019). Millions of Voice for Freedom; Ethiopian Youth National Movement; Solidarity Movement for a New Ethiopia; Dimtsachin Yisema (let our voice be heard); Ethiopian Muslims’ voice against government’s interference in religious affairs; the “Beka” revolution on Facebook and Tweeter; ‘Because I am Oromo’; ‘Oromo revolution’ and ‘Amara revolution’; the powerful Facebook group known as ‘OroMara’ are among the dominant virtual communities formed via social media and Facebook in order to undertake political actions such as political demonstrations and campaigns; #NoMore Movement started in late 2021 as a response to Western interference in Ethiopia’s internal affairs; #StopTigrayGenocide was digital activism campaign organized by Tigrayan (Tagaru) diaspora communities and activists to raise awareness about the humanitarian crisis and mass killings in

Tigray during the war between Ethiopian federal government and the Tigray People's Liberation front (2020-2022); #AmharaGenocide has been used by Amhara activists and diaspora groups to highlight violence against ethnic Amharas, and so forth, to mention but a few examples.

However, though most of the attempted collective political actions by these virtual communities were unsuccessful, there are few successful political demonstrations and campaigns facilitated using social media platforms.

Among those successful ones, for instance, the campaign against the Ethiopian singer Tewodros Kassahun (Teddy Afro), who is known for his revolutionary songs and political dissenting sentiment, a musical concert through the sponsorship of Bedele Brewery (a local subsidiary of the Dutch beer maker Heineken NV) was facilitated by social media platforms. According to (Geme, 2013), the backlash against Tewodros arose because of his glorification of Emperor Menelik II (1889-1913) - a leader arguably vilified by many for committing ethnic cleansing against the southern nation of the country during his reign - Tewodros labeled these Menelik's wars as 'a holy war' during an interview he made with one of the local Amharic magazines, Enqu (Geme, 2013).⁴⁴ The campaign was launched with a hash tag, "Boycott Bedele," with the objective of persuading beer drinkers to ditch and has pressure Bedele to withdraw the sponsorship. The campaign spread across the country through social media platforms (namely, Facebook, X/Twitter), and gained more than forty thousand supporters on Facebook within a few weeks. This activity pressured Bedele to withdraw from the sponsorship. Finally, a yearlong national tour concert was cancelled. Although all social media users were not engaged in and were happy with the campaign due to the fact that the very reason of the campaign was enabled users to hold subjective positions, it was amongst the successful campaigns facilitated via social media.

Also, the recent political transition in the country was considered to be one of the most successful and emancipatory campaigns judged by many participants of the campaign. This radical political shift was the "culmination of hard-fought political activism, youth protest and pressure of internal reformist group that forced the authoritarian regime to restructure its leadership" (Adamu, 2020:15). The protest started by Oromo students and farmers on the new master-plan of Addis Ababa and around the Oromia regional state in 2015 has been rocked the country for three

⁴⁴ Still, there are individuals who argue that his interview was distorted and taken out of context.

successive years. The role of social media platforms during the protest was crucial. In line with this, Adamu (2020) relates,

activists, journalists and bloggers who live abroad, used social media as an indispensable tool to share information about the day to day government practices, political activities, anarchism, human right violations, corruptions, and set strategies to mobilize the society for freedom and democratic reformation (Adamu, 2020:15).

Major events of the situations were mainly covered and reported even by ordinary citizens via social media platforms (Adamu, 2020).⁴⁵ Jawar Mohammed, the founder of Oromia Media Network, who has more than 2.1 million followers on Facebook followers as of July 2022, who also played a significant role in the Oromo protest described the role of media in is interview with Aljazeera (2018) as follows "...you cannot imagine this revolution, this change without social media, People from all corners of the world will snap a picture, record a video and send it to us through WhatsApp or through Facebook. We take that, we verify it, we edit it and we air it back to them." Hence, social media were a preferred media outlet to increase awareness among people, inform and disseminate strategies, recruit members, to mobilize supporters during the protests. In particular, the Oromo and Amhara youths called "Qerro" and "Fano" respectively, protests against the violation of human rights by the now defunct ruling party (the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) was facilitated via dominant social media platforms such as Facebook and X/Twitter (Abreham and Tibebe, 2019). The powerful Facebook group known as "Oromara" was also created during this time.⁴⁶ The group was created basically to bring together the alliance of Oromo and Amhara people in general and the movements of "Qerro" and "Fano" in particular. Thus, all these political movements orchestrated via social media platforms played an indispensable role in realizing the expected political reform in the country in 2018. It has played a vital role in terms of serving as a means of a communication platform between different stakeholders in the politics of the country (Adamu, 2020).

During the Tigray War (202-2022), the brutal conflict between the Ethiopian federal government and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), social media was extensively utilized by both sides. Social media played a critical, but also controversial, role, serving both as a tool for

⁴⁵ Social media were widely used to communicate straightaway with a large numbers of people, form ad hoc teams at a very large scale and exchange crucial information in a timely manner"(Adamu, 2020, 16).

⁴⁶ That is due to the reason that they represent the two dominant ethnic groups in terms of the population size.

disseminating information and as a tool of escalating the conflict. On the one hand, social media platforms were used to spread hate speech and misinformation, including violent rhetoric and genocidal language, which fueled ethnic hatred and conflict, at times even dehumanized the parties in conflict. On the other hand, social media played a crucial role in shaping narratives, mobilizing activism, and also documenting war-related crimes.

Tigriyan civilians, activists, the diaspora, and human rights organizations used different social media platforms including X/Twitter, Facebook, and Telegram to share information and evidence related to the war. They also launched hashtag campaigns (i.e., #Tigray Geneocide, #stopTigrayGenecide, #LetTigrayEat, and so forth), and organized rallies in different parts of the world (i.e., Washington, London, and Brussels). These social media campaigns served as powerful counter-narratives to the federal government's messaging and succeeded in drawing global attention to the crisis, which also pushed the US, EU, and AU to impose sanctions on Ethiopian officials and responded with humanitarian aid.

These facts rightly demonstrate how different political stakeholders such as politicians, political parties, political foundations, high-ranking government officials and ministers, activists and even layman citizens have joined social media platforms and used them for different political purposes. In general, knowing of the power of social media, citizens of the country are using social media platforms for political reasons alongside entertainment and other social media purposes.

3.2. From Connection to Conflict: The Adverse Impact of Social Media in Ethiopia

As was extensively covered, social media platforms contributed to the development of a new political environment in which hitherto excluded groups participate in political discourse and shape policy, but they have also raised concerns. That is, because, there are individuals and groups who use social media to spread false information, provocative statements, hate speech, misinformation, and political extremism (Adamu, 2020). Particularly, individuals who were not happy and have different political position with the recent political transition (2018) and those activists who have certain political and ethnic affiliations, among others, spreading their own opinion, unwarranted assumptions, false allegations, and hate speeches using social media platforms. In fact, as a result of the political orientations of the regime, the majority of virtual communities on social media were organized with ethnic identification. Thus, radical ethno-nationalist politicians produced such mentioned information to mobilize the youth and incite ethnic

violence. Actually, there are misinformation's and hate speeches that have resulted in chaos, identity-based frictions and conflict in the country. For instance, the clash between Afar and Somali; Somali and Oromo; the conflict between Amhara and Oromo ethnic groups; the conflict between Tigray and Amhara; violence among ethnic-Gumuz, Agew, Amhara, and other communities in the Metekel zone of the Benishangul-Gumuz region are the dominant one (Human Right Watch reports, 2020; 2021). Moreover, the Tigray War, which affected the Tigray, Amhara, and Afar regions (2020-2022); and the ongoing onflict between Amhara Fano and federal since April 2023 are further instances of the persisting conflict in the country. Ethiopia has continued to face multi-front ethnic conflicts since 2020, characteried by cycles of violence among different ethnic groups, as well as between regional combatant groups and federal forces.

As indicated, social media platforms have played a significant role in spreading disinformation, fake news, and rumors, particularly during periods of political unrest. Both the government and opposition forces have used these platforms to disseminate their respective propaganda, often resulting in public confusion and heightened tensions among citizens of the country. for example, as reported by BBC Amharic service, the ruling Prosperity Party employed a coordinated network known as “media army” to amplify pro-government narratives and discredit dissenting voices. Conversely, oppositions have also exploited social media as tool to spread disinformation, ethnically charged content. In some cases, they have employed sophisticated AI tools to create and disseminate fake images, videos and audio recordings.

The above cases indicate that though the internet penetration in the country is very low, different stake-holders such as the government, opposition parties, bloggers with critical voices, and individuals living abroad use social media for political purposes. These stake-holders actively engage in social networking websites by treating them as an alternative emancipatory tool or otherwise. Hence, in spite of the fact that social media has a great emancipator quality (Baker, 2009), the role of social media in Ethiopia emanates two different implications. While it comes with emancipatory qualities, the prevalence of social media also creates an apprehension in the country.

3.3. Social Media Regulation in Ethiopia

Even if the government employs social media platforms for its own purposes, with the advent of social media as a political engagement by other means, and the growing of online political expression and participation of the dissent, the government has begun filtering and censoring the sites. Since 2006, especially the post 2005 national election, with the growing number of online posts about politics and the election in particular; when social media platforms are employed to report major political incidences in the country and reflect dissidents' voices, the government began to monitor social media in the country (Megenta, 2010). Basically, it started "when it first blocked blogs and web publications run by its opponents and dissidents" (Megenta, 2010:27).

Before the recent (2018) political reform in the country, for instance, the government was actively involved in filtering and monitoring the internet. The government blocks different websites in the country. The government has curtailed access to information by blocking websites that offer any critical analysis against the government or about any political activities in the country. Websites of political opposition and armed groups such as (<http://ginbot7.org>; <http://www.eprp.com>; <http://www.eppf.net>; <http://oromoliberationfront.org>; <http://onlf.org>; and so forth), media sites (ethiomedias, abbaymedia, eadforum, ethiofreedom, ethiopianreview, satenaw, zehabesha, tenaadam, oromiamedia, debteraw, goolgule, satenaw, quatero, etc.) and blogs (assimba, ethiofitih, ethioreference, enset, ethiopiawinet) were blocked. Also, international websites with human rights baggage such as Human Rights Watch, Committee to Protect Journalists, and Reporters without Border were inaccessible in the country.

Moreover, by paying more attention to the role of social media and its importance for opponents and dissidents, the government even filtered the contents and monitored the internet and social media. It uses different mechanisms to surveillance, intimidate and deters the use of social media platforms for political activities. The government was used, among others, blocking, hacking and monitoring techniques in order to crackdown online political discourses and activities, particularly those that challenged the government (Davison, 2015). It used different surveillance software; technological products such as spyware, in order to silence independent or dissenting voices (Human Right Watch, 2014).

The study "*They Know Everything We Do*" by Human Rights Watch (HRW) states: according to *Telecom and Internet monitoring in Ethiopia* (2014), the Ethiopian government has been collaborating with a number of European businesses to increase the country's use of monitoring.

Earlier in July 2015, the world learned that the government of Ethiopia used to purchase spyware called Remote Control System (RCS) from an Italian business named Hacking Team, which sells intrusion and surveillance technologies. According to the case's detailed summary provided by HRW, spyware would enable the government to regulate software access to activity on computers, phones, and other devices.

According to Freedom on the Net Reports (2016), “Ethiopia has a nationwide, politically motivated internet blocking and filtering regime that is reinforced during sensitive political events.” Due to the protests facilitated via social media that have swept through out some regions of the country, the government imposed a six-month state of emergency on October, 2016. Under the state of emergency, the government of the country officially shutdown social media and file-shared platforms to prevent citizens from communicating about the protests those were unfolding at the time (FOTN, 2016).

The government of Ethiopia not only blocks websites and social media networks and is keen on using spyware technologies to monitor and control social media, but it also arrests those who post information and views critical of the government (bloggers) on social media platforms (Amnesty International and OONI, 2016). For instance, in 2014, “Zone 9” blogging groups were criminally charged under anti-terrorism laws (Davison, 2015).

Communication bans on phone and the internet services have continued in Ethiopia, even following the recent political upheavals. Although Ethiopia Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed promised a new era for media and freedom of speech during his inauguration speech in April, 2018, and prominent political members, activists, journalists were released from prison and websites and blogs were unbanned and unblocked during the transition period, the government has since reverted to repressive tactics. It has increasingly relied on legal frameworks, surveillance techniques, and physical shutdowns to suppress dissent during elections, conflict s, and even national exams. For instance, the government blocked Telegram/WhatsApp for several days following the leak of national university entrance exams in June 2019 and again in 2021 (continued each year's national university admission exams since then); two weeks nationwide internet blackout in 2020 following alleged Coup attempts; on June 29, 2020, after the murder of well-known Oromo musician Hachalu Hundessa, the authorities shut down the internet and phones. Similar to this, on November 4, the Tigray region lost all phone and internet connectivity due to

the outbreak conflict between the Tigray regional state and the federal government. During the two years of war, Tigray remained under a near complete communication blackout.

In another instance, amid the crisis involving Orthodox Church, the government also blocked access to social media platforms for five months. More recently, in response to the Amhara Fano insurgency, the government of the country shutdown mobile and internet connection (partially restored by now, 2025). Even, the mass virtual protest against Ethiopian's ruling party, organized by Ye-abronet-Ethiopia with the slogan '*Stop the War! End Authoritarian Rule! Let Peace Prevail!*' on June 7, 2025, was also disrupted by the government, which blocked YouTube and hindered internet connectivity.

4. The Nexus between Social Media and Peace Building

The introduction of the internet and social media as part of information and communication technologies are becoming important tools to influence social and political life. They have created a new landscape of social and political change (Bargh and McKenna, 2004; Keith, 2016). In this connection, Baker (2009) asserts that the internet and social media have facilitated participatory politics and political mass mobilization. It creates a new form of political sphere and fosters political involvement (John, 2017). It creates an easy and fast way for both the public and politicians to communicate with each other. It enables everybody: the government and the public alike, to deliver self-published information (Onyedikachi et al., 2017; John, 2017). Individuals engage in politics by the mediation of the internet technology (Gil de Zúñiga, Molyneux, & Zheng, 2014). They further point out that,

People can pursue their political goals online by forwarding emails, sharing opinions about politics and current events, expressing dissatisfaction with governments by commenting on government officials' social media pages, and participating in online collective actions against certain policies (Gil de Zúñiga et.al. 2014:2).

As noted elsewhere, the contribution of the internet and social media is not only to the public, but they have also equally contributed to political officials (John, 2017). It allows government officials (politicians) to be more accessible and closer to the public and, similarly, the public has an opportunity to contact government officials directly. And also help the government to hold accountability and transparency (Comninos, 2013). This service of internet technology implies that both parties (the government as well as the public) have access to enhancing their political

participation. In general, the internet and social media are described as an important tool to mediate and shape politics.

People use social media, as we are all too aware, for a variety of reasons. Social media has both positive and negative effects on promoting peace (Comninou, 2013). On the one side, there are users who use social media to promote democracy and unity, to spread peace and stability, and to eradicate hate and violence by posting some sort of verifiable account of the events that have place. On the other hand, some users (especially extremist groups) use social media to escalate violence and to inflame ethnic tension by disseminating false information, fabricating hate speech and propaganda, and painting a false picture of what happened. These actions appear to have contributed to violence and instability. Therefore, these findings unequivocally show that social media is a tool used by both pro-peace and pro-violence individuals.

Political turmoil and peace, however, are not caused by social media; rather, both phenomena are made possible by it. For instance, most disputes with the government begin with disagreements over important political topics. Equality, corruption, justice, human rights, and other causes may be among those that lead to political violence. Users of social media undoubtedly consider these problems to be the cause or the immediate reason behind political protests and acts of violence against the government. Additionally, utilizing various social media channels, both supporters of the administration and the opposition engage in this particular debate simultaneously. If the voice of the pro-democracy movement dominated the social media and political unrest happens, the issue should be why there were more users from the protest movement than from the pro-government (the ruling party). Therefore, in order to maintain a lasting peace, it is crucial to identify the root causes of the violence rather than blaming social media as a determining factor. That's because maintaining peace cannot necessarily be ensured by merely obstructing the causes of increased conflict. In line with this, the absence of social media may reduce positive peace, but at the same time, it generates the absence of negative peace. Because it infringes on the public interest and creates social injustices, which are the character of the absence of negative peace. Indeed, people, conceptualize peace as a removal of conflict or war (Hansen, 1987). However, peace encompasses both positive and negative aspects (Galtung, 1964). As Hansen (1987:5) posits,

The peace question has to be seen in two aspects: peace should be conceptualized and perceived not only in the negative sense of minimizing or resolving conflict but

also in the positive sense of creating material conditions which provide for the mass of the people a certain minimum condition of security, economic welfare, political efficacy and psychic well-being .

Those manifestations of the absence of negative peace such as dearth of public interest, social injustice, insecurity and poverty are the reasons for the occurrence of conflict or war (the absence of positive peace), in one way or another. Accordingly, achieving negative peace is a precondition for the attainment of positive peace. Therefore, this implies that blocking social media is not a necessary condition for the achievement of peace.

In fact, as peace is necessary for the wellbeing of all people and the government is the guardian of peace alongside everybody, the government must take different regulatory measures in relation to social media. But, the state regulations concerning social media should always consider various conditions. First and for most, the mechanisms should take the very nature of social media into account. As stated above, social media is a means to an end. As far as it is an instrument and used for different purposes by its users, the question should be how social media is used and adopted by the community. Understanding the potential and proper use of social media can allow us to work on peace building. The government should, therefore, work on how the social media users promote peace building.

5. Conclusion and Implications

Social media now play a bigger role in Ethiopia. Even if social media is widely used in the nation and has a significant impact on many facets of society, it also contributes to a new political environment. Facebook is the most desired social media channel for boosting political engagement among the most widely used social media platforms. Facebook is one of the social media platforms used by politicians, activists, political parties, organizations, and others who are actively involved in the political landscape of the nation. Thus, as instrumentalism asserts, in Ethiopia social media platforms such as Facebook, X/Twitter, Telegram and You Tube have been actively used as crucial tools by activists, politicians, and citizens to share information, promote political reform, expose injustice, and also to mobilize and organize demonstrations against gross violation human right by government in the country. By serving as alternative political forums that bypass mainstream, state controlled media, these platforms reflects the instrumentalist view that technology is a neutral tool shaped by users' intentions to fulfill political goals, among others.

However, despite users employing social media with both good and bad intentions, social media algorithms and its structural features have also shaped political dynamics and social behavior in ways that go beyond user control. Hence, in the Ethiopia social media functions as ‘double-edged sword’ a tool that supports democratization while simultaneously shaping political realities, and often arbitrarily.

As a result of social media realities in Ethiopia, while social media in Ethiopia has provided avenues for political engagement, the government of the country made an effort to monitor and censor political activity taking place online, with a focus on weakening the influence of pro-violence movements equipped with social media. However, as it was designed to stifle the voice of the opposition and the pro-democracy movement, the purported pervasiveness of government surveillance in the nation threatened the liberties and rights of the populace. Users have thought of practicing self-censorship as a result of surveillance techniques, especially after 2018. They refrain from engaging in political activity online and are compelled to use fictitious identities and false information in place of their real names, ages, sexual orientations, and other identifying characteristics. However, as long as the offline political scene is difficult and there is social media illiteracy, such control and surveillance do not bring about the desired political aim and peace.

In order to promote peace in relation to social media, it is imperative to approach social media comprehensively, in terms its specificity, features, types, mediating roles, users identities, and the broader sociopolitical context, since each of these elements overwhelmingly shapes its relationship with peace building. For instance, the functions and impacts of different platforms, such as YouTube and Facebook, are not identical; each facilitates communication and political engagement in distinct ways. By the same token, the mediating role of social media in political campaigns differs from its role in the disseminations of everyday political information. The impact of social media also varies depending on the user’s level of digital literacy and critical consciousness. Moreover, the environment in which social media content is produced, and consumed, whether actively or passively, further affects its outcomes. These varieties emphasize the need for nuanced and context based analysis. Hence, any attempt to address the role of social media in peace building must move beyond one-size-fits-all approaches and instead adopt an integrative framework that takes into account all these dimensions.

Accordingly, the government consequently assists communities in improving how they use social media. To increase social media users' accountability, ethical instruction is crucial. Among the significant problems of social media is the “difficulty of ensuring the reliability and accountability of facts and information disseminated through the social media” (Fitsum, 2012:110). The source, accuracy, and interest in confirming or contextualizing the information are frequently not factors that social media users pay attention to. The government and other stakeholders should therefore promote and reinforce the concepts of responsibility and transparency with relation to social media users. Tension among users is decreased when individuals take responsibility for the content they self-publish and produce, share, and refrain from using hate speech or propaganda. As a result, when users are acting morally, they avoid using social media to encourage or fuel violence.

Similarly, the government as a user must consider ethical engagement in social media. Governments should be honest, accountable and responsible for its social media communications. For example, should be clear and avoid fake accounts while using social media platforms including managing the so called its ‘digital army’, using platforms to encourage unity and informed discourse.

Additionally, those regulatory measures must to be in accordance with the nation's constitution as well as international conventions and international law. Due to the fact that occasionally regulatory acts go against Ethiopia's duties under international law and allow breaches of numerous human rights. For instance, the restriction imposed on accessing social media “is a violation of people’s freedom of expression, and specifically, people’s right to hold opinions without interference, and their right to receive and impart information of all kinds as guaranteed under article 19 (1) and (2) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which Ethiopia has ratified” (Amnesty International and OONI, 2016:7). Thus, such a kind of inconsistency has its own adverse ramifications to the country.

The design of social media platforms must evolve to foster ethical standards, particularly through the refinement of their algorithmic structures. This includes enhancing the capacity to regulate content, identify and isolate false information, and prioritize verified and trustworthy sources. By enabling such controls, platforms can help prevent the spread of harmful misinformation that may incite violence, social unrest, or even loss of life. A tragic example is the case of a university lecturer killed in Bahir Dar in November, 2021, after being falsely accused on Facebook as a

“Tigrayan traitor” and accuses of serious crimes (without evidence). Despite his family and others flagging the posts as dangerous, the platform failed to take timely action. This failure contributed to his murder. Such result might be prevented if social media platforms were ethically designed to quickly detect, flag, and remove inciting and false content, so that promoting users’ safety and dignity.

Overall, this implies that it is crucial to take into account the various elements that constitute the relationship between technology and humanity, particularly regarding social media and its users. In order to foster peace in Ethiopia, therefore, rather than viewing social media simply as a tool or a determining factors that influences the political landscape of the country, it is better to treat social media in its specificity.

References

- Adam, G., & Holguin, L. (2003, May). The Media’s Role in Peace building: Asset or Liability?’. In *Our Media 3 Conference* (pp. 19-21).
- Adamu, M. A. (2020). Role of social media in Ethiopia's recent political transition. *Journal of Media and Communication Studies*, 12(2), 13-22.
- Adler, Paul S. (2006). "Technological determinism." The International Encyclopedia of Organization Studies.
<http://masscommtheory.com/theory%20overviews/technologicaldeterminism/>
- Amnesty International and OONI, (2016). *Ethiopia Offline: Evidence of Social Media Blocking and Internet Censorship in Ethiopia* (Ref: AFR 25/5312/2016)
<https://www.justice.gov/eoir/page/file/918516/download>
- Auvinen, A. M. (2011). Social media—the new power of political influence. *Centre for European Studies*.
- Baker, Megan. (2009) " The Impact of Social Networking Sites on Politics." *Undergraduate Review: a Journal of Undergraduate Student Research* 10:72-74.
<http://fisherpub.sjfc.edu/ur/vol10/iss1/12>
- Bargh, J. A., & McKenna, K. Y. (2004). The Internet and social life. *Annu. Rev. Psychol.*, 55, 573-590
- Baruah, T. D. (2012). Effectiveness of Social Media as a tool of communication and its potential for technology enabled connections: A micro-level study. *International Journal of Scientific and Research Publications*, 2(5), 1-10.
- Bimber, B. (1990). Karl Marx and the three faces of technological determinism. *Social Studies of Science*, 20(2), 333-351.

- Comninos, A. (2013). The Role of Social Media and User-generated Content in PostConflict Peace building. *Washington, DC: The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/The World Bank.*
- Davison, William. (2015). Ethiopian's Crackdown on dissent drives opposition to push for 'freedom first' <http://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2015/jun/11/ethiopiackdown-dissent-drives-opposition-push-freedom-first>
- Deutsch, K. W. (1959). The Impact of Science and Technology on International Politics. *Daedalus*, 88(4), 669-685. Feenberg, Andrew. (2002). *Transforming technology: A critical theory revisited*. Oxford University Press
- _____. (1999). *Questioning technology*. Psychology Press
- _____. (2010). Ten paradoxes of technology. *Techné: Research in Philosophy and Technology*, 14(1), 3-15
- Feynman, R. P. (1998). *The meaning of it all: thoughts of a citizen scientist*. Da Capo Press.
- Fitsum, Mahlet. (2012). Human Security and Internet Governance: The Impact of Social Media and ICTs on Conflict Management and Peace Building in *Human Security Perspectives Vol 1* (2012), 98-116. [www.etc-graz.at/typo3/fileadmin/.../9-HSP12_Fitsum_Halefom_FINAL .pdf](http://www.etc-graz.at/typo3/fileadmin/.../9-HSP12_Fitsum_Halefom_FINAL.pdf) Freedom on the Net, (2016). *Ethiopia* – Freedom House <https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/.../FOTN%202016%20Ethiopia...>
- Galtung, J. (1964). An Editorial, *Journal of Peace Research*, 1 (1), 1-4.
- Gil de Zúñiga, H., Molyneux, L., & Zheng, P. (2014). Social media, political expression, and political participation: Panel analysis of lagged and concurrent relationships. *Journal of Communication*, 64(4), 612-634.
- Geme, Tigist. (2013). The dark si). The Teddy Afro's fame and fortune <http://www.harartubes.com/2013/12/22/the-dark-side-ofteddy-afros-fame-and- fortune/>
- Hansen, E. (1987). *Africa: perspectives on peace & development*. Zed Books.
- Heidegger, Martin. (1977). *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. W. Lovitt (New York: Harper & Row)
- Human Right Watch (HRW) reports, (2014). "They Know Everything We Do": Telecom and Internet Surveillance in Ethiopia <https://www.hrw.org/report/2014/.../they-know-everything-we-do/telec...>
- Kaplan, M. David. (2004). *Reading in the Philosophy of Technology*. Rowman and Littlefield publishers
- Megenta, A. T. (2011, May). *The Internet's Democratization Effect in Authoritarianism with Adjectives: The Case of Ethiopian Participatory Media*. Reuters Institute Fellowship Paper. University of Oxford <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/.../The%20Internet's%20Democra...>

- Negeri, Tiksa. (2016). Why Ethiopia blocked social media. <http://www.theatlantic.com/news/archive/2016/07/ethiopia-blocked-social-media/490775/>
- Rapp, Friedrich. (1981). *Analytical Philosophy of Technology*. D. Reidel Publishing Company
- Abreham G, Tibebe B (2019). The Role of Social Media in Citizen's Political Participation. IFIP WG 8.6. International Conference on Transfer and Diffusion of IT. Accra, Ghana
- Arafa M, Armstrong C (2016). Facebook to Mobilize, Twitter to Coordinate Protests, and YouTube to Tell the World: New Media, Cyber activism, and the Arab Spring. *Journal of Global Initiatives: Policy, Pedagogy, Perspective* 10:1
- John S (2017). A study on Impact of Social Media on Education, Business and Society. *International Journal of Research in Management and Business Studies* 4:3
- Keith T (2016). The History of Social Media: Social Networking Evolution. Retrieved from <https://historycooperative.org/the-history-of-social-media/>
- Maisam H (2019). Latest Social Media Stats for 2019. Retrieved from <https://socialmedianewstime.com/2018/01/22/latest-social-media-stats-for-2019/>
- Onyedikachi M, Celestine N, Chibuzo O, Adaeze A (2017). The Role of Social Media in Enhancing Political Participation in Nigeria. *International Digital Organization for Scientific Research* 2(3):44-54.
- Oxford Dictionary (2012). Retrieved from <http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/social%2Bmedia?q=social+media>
- Surjit K, Manpreet K (2013). Impact of Social Media on Politics. *Gian Jyoti E-Journal* 3:4. Retrieved from www.gjimt.ac.in/GianJyotiEJournal.htm 23.